

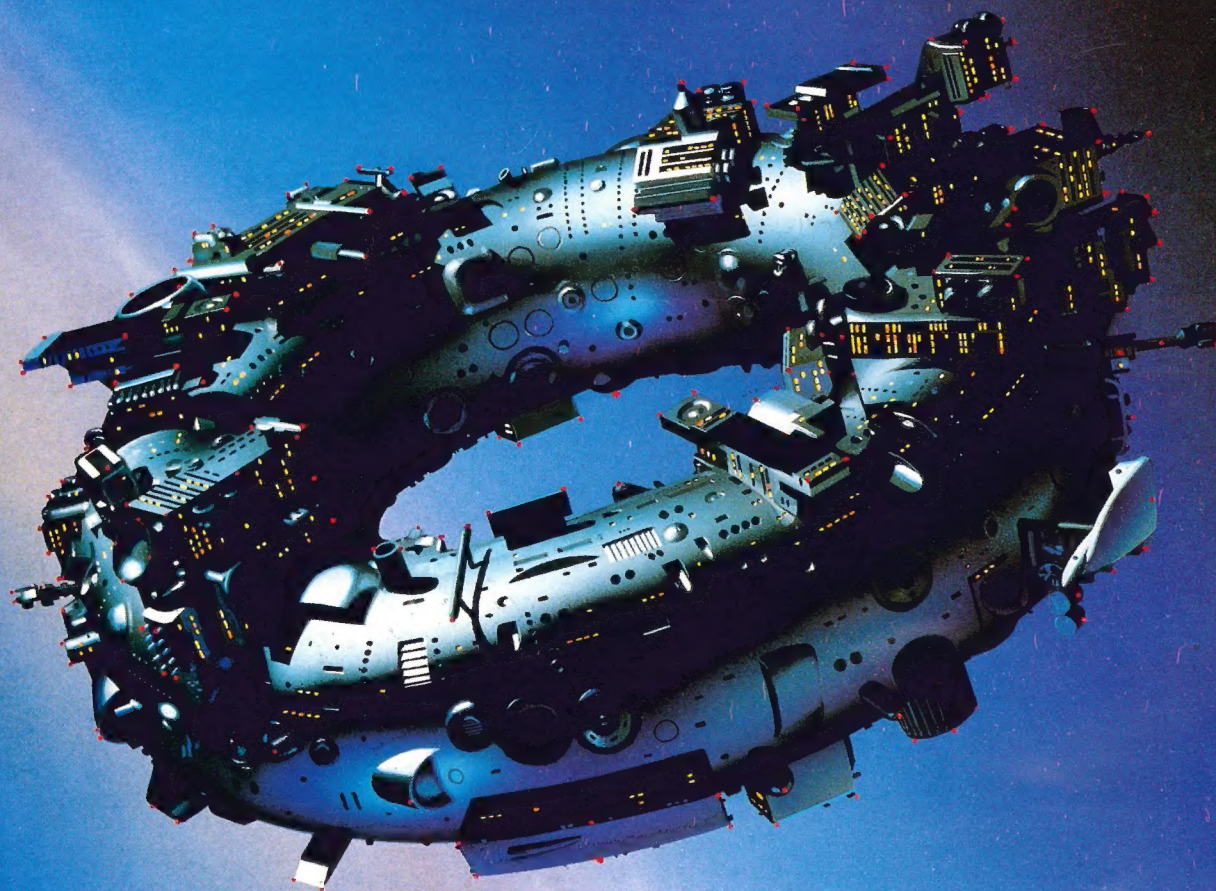
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**SEPTEMBER
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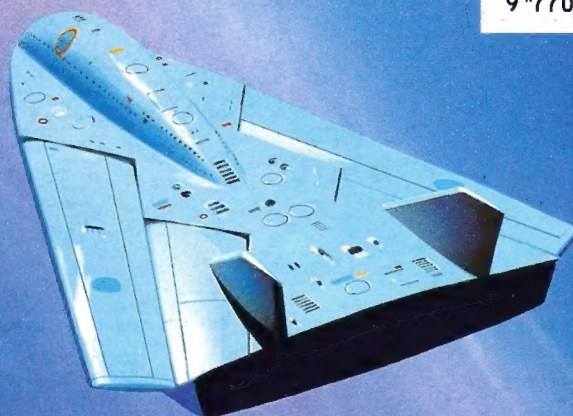
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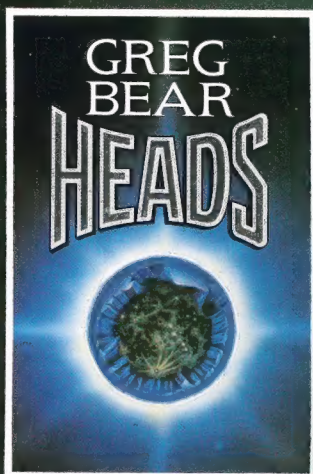
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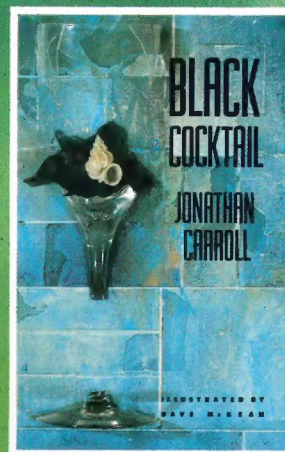
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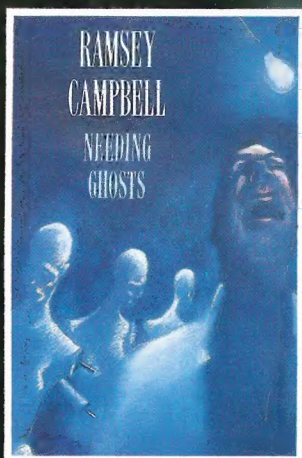
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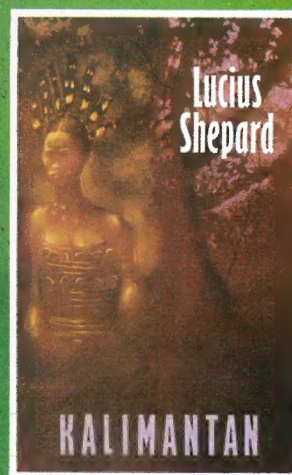
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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 39**September 1990**

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Interface

David Pringle

In a note printed in the letter column of *Interzone* 36 I invited readers to send us their lists of ten favourite science-fiction novels. I added: "Not just the standard 'all-time classics,' but perhaps out-of-the-way sf books which you particularly admire and which might be of interest to other IZ readers. Likewise for fantasy and horror, if you wish." There have been a number of responses, which I'll extract or summarize here.

Arthur Straker, editor of the sf magazine *R.E.M.* (see below) writes: "You asked for it! Ten of my favourite sf novels, in no particular order. (1) *Dr Adder* by K. W. Jeter; (2) *Dhalgren* by Samuel R. Delany; (3) *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* by Philip K. Dick; (4) *The Stars My Destination* by Alfred Bester; (5) *Palimpsests* by Carter Scholz & Glenn Harcourt; (6) *Inverted World* by Christopher Priest; (7) *Kalki* by Gore Vidal; (8) *The Embedding* by Ian Watson; (9) *The Drowned World* by J. G. Ballard; (10) *The Steps of the Sun* by Walter Tevis. Well, that's my list this week."

ANYONE HEARD OF FEDERBUSH?

Another reader, **Liz Robinson**, says: "If I listed my top ten sf novels most of them would be the standard favourites, but there are three books I like a lot which don't seem as well known as they should be – in fact, I don't know of anyone who has read the third on my list. (1) *No Man Friday* by Rex Gordon, in which our hero is stranded alone on Mars with minimal life support. It starts as a good survival story but shifts into a higher gear when he finally encounters the local life forms. (2) *Lords of the Starship* by Mark Geston. Following a victorious but devastating war against a mysterious evil power, the survivors, left in a state of depression and terminal apathy, are reanimated by a project to build a giant starship to take them to another 'Home.' All marvellously weird. (3) *The Man Who Lived in Inner Space* by Arnold Federbush. Reads as if written by a brilliant but depressed teenager. A lonely mutilated man operates a huge factory entirely on his own (he is the only character to appear in the book except at the beginning and the end). Using the factory's resources, he makes a sort of diving bell and then escapes into the sea where he achieves a symbiotic union with the ocean. I found the story quite extraordinarily sad and difficult to forget."

THE FAR FUTURE AND METAPHORICAL POTENTIALS

C. S. Barlow has sent us a list which mixes sf and fantasy: "In no particular order: the Gormenghast trilogy by Mervyn Peake (it's hard to include one without the other two); *The Godwhale* by T. J. Bass (best 'living-underground-and-forgotten-what-the-outside-world-is-like' book I've read); *The Dying Earth* by Jack Vance (if earth's last days are going to be like this, fetch me a time machine!); *The Dancers at the End of Time* by Michael Moorcock (ditto, I think); *Niffit the Lean* by Michael Shea; *Neuromancer* by William Gibson; *The Gardens of Delight* by Ian Watson; *Hothouse* by Brian Aldiss (visionary – for me, his best ever); *Eon* by Greg Bear (not necessarily the best, but definitely in my top three 'giant alien artifact' novels); *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien (I bet you didn't expect that); and *Dune* by Frank Herbert (or that!)."

The advertising manager of the British SF Association, **Dave Wood**, writes: "Being careful not to set them up as 'classics' but, let us say, books which give me pleasure and are eminently re-readable, can I offer the following: *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* by Chingiz Aitmatov; *A Man of Double Deed* by Leonard Daventry; *Space Relations* by Donald Barr; *Cirque* by Terry Carr; *The Hole in the Zero* by M. K. Joseph; *Gunner Cade* by 'Cyril Judd'; *Final Blackout* by L. Ron Hubbard; *Dr Orpheus* by Ian Wallace. Plenty there to search out, ranging through Russian angst, alien contact, the gestalt potential of telepathy, sexuality, religious allegory, space opera, future war, the paradoxes of time travel and one (guess which) that John Clute was once driven to describe as 'an examination of the metaphorical potentials of sf language and subject matter'."

SOME OF THESE AREN'T SF ...

Yet another reader, **Tracy Prytherch**, has written: "Ten favourites! All-time first: *The Twilight of Briareus* by Richard Cowper; *The Door Into Summer* and *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* by Robert Heinlein; *Let the Fire Fall* by Kate Wilhelm; *Daughter of Regals* by Stephen Donaldson (especially the title story); *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Chrysalids* by John Wyndham; *Sunburst* by Phyllis Gotlieb; *More Than Human* by Theodore Sturgeon; *The Evolution Man* by Roy Lewis. And

eleventh, because I'm not sure if it counts as sf but it's the most evocative 'end-of-the-world' tale I've read, *On the Beach* by Nevil Shute."

And **Miles Hadfield** gives us the following: (1) *Ice* by Anna Kavan; (2) *Cryptozoic!* or *Barefoot in the Head* by Brian Aldiss (can't decide); (3) *A Scanner Darkly* or *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* by Philip K. Dick; (4) *A Child in Time* by Ian McEwan; (5) *Crash* or *The Unlimited Dream Company* by J. G. Ballard; (6) *Golem 100* by Alfred Bester; (7) *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Le Guin; (8) *Hawksmoor* by Peter Ackroyd; (9) *Dr Mirabilis* by James Blish; (10) *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison and *Darkness Visible* by Ralph Ellison (tie). Some of these aren't sf but do deal with themes of interest to the genre."

A CHERRYH FAN

David Gillon sent us a list of ten sf novels which seemed to be excessively dominated by one author, C.J. Cherryh. He also appended a separate list of fantasy favourites: "(1) *The War for the Oaks* by Emma Bull. The best urban fantasy I have read ... it's time this book was published in the UK. (2) *The Chronicles of Morgaine* and *Exile's Gate* by C. J. Cherryh. Forget Elric and Stormbringer, if you want mad hero(in)es and magical swords, then obsessed Morgaine and Changeling are the ultimate realization of that theme. (3) *Lavondyss* by Robert Holdstock. Truly mythical. (4) *Sword-Dancer*, *Sword-Singer*, *Sword-Maker* by Jennifer Roberson; (5) *Good Omens* by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman; *The Dreamstone* and *The Tree of Swords and Jewels* by C. J. Cherryh. If you must read Celtic fantasy then read this. (6) *The Paladin* by C. J. Cherryh. Takes the old standard swordswoman plot and makes it work. (7) *The Ladies of Mandrigyn*, *The Witches of Wenshar*, *The Dark Hand of Magic* by Barbara Hambly. (8) *Arrows of the Queen*, *Arrow's Flight*, *Arrow's Fall* by Mercedes Lackey; (10) *The Belgariad* by David Eddings. Well, it had to be here, didn't it?"

Enough for now. Thanks to all those who sent in their lists of favourites (and keep them coming: we'll endeavour to print more in the future). Did you notice something about all the above lists? They contain no overlaps. Which goes to show what a varied genre science fiction is, and how varied are the responses of its readership.

Continued on page 74

Beefcake

Keith Brooke

Soon work would be suspended for the first time in sixty-six days. Marcia decided the check her systems again. Floating at zee-gee in her microhabitat, she allowed a wisp of consciousness to travel down through a fleshy interface, down through optic cables and into the realm that was all machine. Drifting, she was a sonic drill, humming angelically, singing the rocky substance of asteroid C127 into a fine dust of particles; she was the mass separator, sifting, sorting, selecting organic chondrules from the slurry, sorting the debris by use and by value; she was a hydrocarbon chain, cleaved from the rock, packed with others of its kind into a tiny package of fat, ready to be transported to Elysium, the GenGen research colony that hung two kays distant.

Like all the GenGen fatties, Marcia spent most of her existence cocooned in her microhabitat, a shell of foamed platinum and spun plastic fibres that held all the requirements for a productive life. At nearly 400 kilos she was average for one of GenGen's operatives, each of her body's twenty-eight semi-autonomous compartments controlling a separate mining module somewhere on the dwindling surface of C127.

Neural spikes called her and, rising through microcircuitry, pulsing through optic cables, oozing through the fatty interface zone, Marcia was, again, queen of her fleshy domain.

Proceeding by rote, she closed down her miners one by one. Only when she had finished did she allow herself to believe that the four hours of relaxation would proceed. More often than not there would be a last-moment directive over the comnet, a new drive for production to meet some obscure need for materials in Elysium. But today they were clear, today the GenGen fatties were going to party.

For a few seconds Marcia stretched her massive form and, idly, she directed a robot arm to scratch at a roach, one of the hyposentient cleaners that scavenged for gunge in the deep folds of her flesh.

Summoning up the necessary effort, she prompted another arm to ease the optic cables from her interface zones. It was a time-consuming process, delicate in the need to avoid damage both to the hardware and to the sensitive skin around the sockets. One of the biofaces gave a painful twinge when its cables were detached; instantly a nearby roach sprayed the affected area with a fine mist of tailored bacteria and the inflammation began to subside.

The removing of the cables always gave Marcia a

kind of high: each of her compartments, one by one, reorienting its identity. Jacked in, the compartment, the bioface, was isolated from its physical host by a semi-independent nervous system and by its own immune system – without this autonomy the host would reject the interface, reject the cables, which was why such a sizable body was necessary to house the cyborg units; detached, the immune and the nervous subsystems melded with Marcia's own.

A slight tug of acceleration told Marcia her mictat had left C127. The pull was only faint but it was enough to remind her of the burden of her own mass.

Another slight surge and the mictat entered a docking bay of the hollowed asteroid that was her destination. She saw the stars black out on a small TV screen, cee-ems from her eyes; jacked in, the cameras would have been her eyes, but now she was only a passenger.

The air began to smell different, a kind of sweetness that hinted at open spaces and strange people, a sweetness what was not of the air that had cycled through Marcia for the preceding sixty-six days.

Her mictat split in two and she gave the involuntary gasp that she always did when her world was peeled away. One half lifted and then she felt cold arms closing on her and pulling, drawing her from her shell.

A light robotic mobility frame held her to one wall of the docking bay as it jacked itself in to one of her many vacant sockets. Just before she prompted it to take her through an opening door she glanced at the two halves of her mictat, mentally comparing its small size with her own bulk, and again she was struck by the thinness of the shell that usually separated her from the void. It made her shiver, yet she felt more at home there than she did out here, exposed to this strange-smelling air.

Passing into a large room, she saw fatties upside down and sideways on to her own version of upright. She pressed one of her feet against a wall and let herself drift through the heart of the chamber.

Bulldog was there, of course, floating as he liked to do over the others, surveying them with a satisfied smile on his face. He was about Marcia's size, but where her body was pale and depilated his was a swarthy yellowish-brown, covered in a dense coat of curly black hair. His beard tangled with the hair on his chest, twisting down over bulbous breasts, sinking itself into the folds that joined his massive slabs of adipose tissue.

At the fatties' last R&R Marcia had asked Bulldog to father a child with her and he had refused.

Fatties didn't have children. That was always a joke with the littl'uns, the thought alone seemed to drive them to hilarity. Still Marcia wanted to try, but Bulldog had been adamant. What would a fatty's child have in this world? It would inherit such debt that it might be forced into a role even more dire than that of its parents. Marcia had heard talk of what happened to people with such debts. No, Bulldog had said in his pompous way, it was simply not practical.

But that didn't stop Marcia wanting.

Bulldog was her only real friend; she knew he would be a good father. He would love to, he had told her, it would be wonderful in another existence, but still, in this one, he refused.

"Maybe if you followed your advice packages a little more closely," he had told her, "you might see things more rationally. Your mediprobes know best – they'll control these urges."

Drugs. Everything was drugs: their existence, the end-products from their mining, all their answers. True, Marcia could find some chemical to quell her broodiness, but the need was so strong in her, she couldn't want it to go.

Even thinking about it made her skin flush and her heart beat erratically. Her frame's mediprobes sent a strong package of advice to take a mood settler – a quick infusion and she would be calm again – but she refused. At least a fatty had control over her medication, if nothing else. Unlike most of her colleagues, Marcia preferred not to use the vast array of drugs that the General Genetics Corporation made available. She was a pharmaceutical refusenik. The only ones she used on a regular basis were the bulimics – the appetite enhancers they put in the food-cakes – and the hypoglycaemics she needed to control her diabetes.

Bulldog had spotted Marcia and now his mobility frame was carrying him in her direction. "Marcia, my dear," he said, as his frame stopped him indecently close to her; he could be pompous and patronizing with equal facility. "Good to see you...in the flesh, so to speak." He laughed at his own familiar greeting and then looked at her as if he expected her to continue the joke. After a few more seconds he looked away and allowed his frame to turn him 180 degrees so Marcia didn't know if he was up or she down; she prompted her frame to draw her legs together, and stared at Bulldog's floating genitals.

"ChessNet?" suggested Bulldog, staring up/down at her through his drifting beard.

They played for nearly an hour; Bulldog won, inevitably. His rational approach – always weighing the pros and cons in an on-going cost-benefit analysis – was too much for Marcia's simple technique. One time she sacrificed 3.8 to capture a mere 1.2 in the 3D logic net that was the domain of their game. Why did you do that? Bulldog had cried. But Marcia had simply wanted to, something beyond Bulldog's grasp; she had liked the pattern it made. Bulldog entangled her in Möbius ribbons and won soon afterwards. In their few hours together the fatties obsessively played games like ChessNet, games that could easily be played over the comnet. That way they maintained their distance, preserving the cocoons they had left in the docking bays to be sanitized and overhauled for the next twenty-two day shift.

The game over, they hung in the air that now smelled so familiar. Bulldog was still waiting for Marcia to speak but she didn't want to risk her primitive desires becoming a topic for dispute once again.

They drifted through another set of doors and then on to the Mister, where so many of the fatties ended up at some time in their R&R. The Mister was a large chamber, big enough to hold every fatty and still with room for privacy.

Clouds of warm mist swirled around Marcia and Bulldog as they passed through the inner set of doors. The moisture made breathing difficult but the air was rich in oxygen and one small, damp breath lasted a long time, even for a fatty. The air was scented, too, light fragrances that drifted with the mist; narcotics clung to the water molecules and these Marcia liked – they lightened her head, lifted her just enough so that she didn't object when Bulldog actually touched her, his clammy hand under the slab of her arm, pulling her guiding her away from the gaggle of fatties that always stayed near the entrance and on to the furthest recesses where they could be alone, the two of them. Music drifted with the mists, with the scents: Roegel's Breuch, augmented with subsonics that made Marcia's flesh resonate with vigour. She wanted to ask him, she wanted him to want her, she wanted his seed, yet she was afraid of his rejection.

The mists parted for an instant and Marcia saw a strange look in Bulldog's eyes.

Grey floated between them and his grip loosened. Marcia drifted. She felt as though she was sinking through a mist of semen and she wanted it to fill her as it so unfairly filled Bulldog's testes.

She felt warmth against her belly, a distant warmth, and she realized that it was Bulldog, her sense of touch numbed by her biofaces, his coarse black body hair scratching against her.

His hands were on her again, laboriously kneading her flesh, and she knew then what was going to happen. "But the future," she said, wanting to tear her tongue out for reminding him of his doubts.

"I'm sorry, Marcia, my love," he said. "I was too negative. I want this child, I want it badly. Maybe there are ways for it to carve some sort of future without having to pay our debts."

There was no meaning to Marcia; her vast, senseless body had taken over. *He wanted to.* Their bodies were pressing together, flesh to flesh, and Marcia was terrified by this loss of personal distance, a social nicety so important to the fatties.

"How...?" she said to Bulldog, so close.

He nudged her away and a robot arm worked at the genitalia Marcia had been faced with only an hour or so before. Through the mist she saw his organ grow and then sag, grow and stay hard, pushing against the curve of his belly. The question remained until another arm took hold of Marcia and she realized that Bulldog was guiding it as he was guiding the arms that pried her monstrous legs apart and then drew her towards him.

Their flesh joined, hot, sweating skin against more hot skin. Vaguely, Marcia could feel the small element of hardness pushing between her painfully spread legs. Was this how it felt to have a man enter her body? It didn't feel like much at all, but the prospect

of fulfilment kept her going, despite the increasing difficulty of breathing, despite the pains in her tiring body. Eventually Bulldog began to make strange whimpering noises and then, suddenly, his body heaved at Marcia and subsided in a terrifying, disturbing quiver, spasms of spent passion racking him, scaring Marcia.

She pulled away and thought of what they had done. So little semen from such a huge body, it was almost laughable, the state from which Bulldog was slowly recovering. Pompous Bulldog, patronizing Bulldog, and now emptied Bulldog.

Marcia felt numb, as if nothing had really happened between them. She thought of her goal and wondered if Bulldog had done it right – shouldn't she have felt more? It would be ironic if, after such effort, he had been pressing himself into the wrong fold of flesh.

Marcia felt terrible. She had been sick three times since midnight and still her artificially promoted appetite gave her no rest. Her mediprobes were worried, she could tell by the way they kept sending out advice packages: take this, take that, take everything. Illness is a crime against your company, she remembered from her schooling; it increases your debt, the debt that your children will inherit. In her youth, Marcia had learned that the indebtedness of humanity had its roots in the pre-space credit book, and in the costs of moving out of the gravity well: *Buy some space and let your children pay!* Now, thoughts of letting children pay sliced into her heart and she brought up her latest snack. Bio-mech mice sucked up the vomit and instantly Marcia prompted an arm to feed her another food-cake. It was soy-cow, her favourite, and she managed to keep it down this time.

It was ten weeks since Bulldog had spat his semen into a fold of her body. Normally regular as a pulsar, she had missed her last two periods.

Bulldog had pestered her constantly after their sticky encounter in the Mister chamber; he had called her repeatedly over the comnet, asking how she was, asking if she knew.

She told him when she was late, she told him when she was certain and then he stopped calling her. It was as if he was embarrassed, as if this confirmation of his manhood served only to emphasize the lack of control he had over his life.

Looking around herself, studying the small spaces between her body and the inside of her mictat, Marcia knew her problems had barely begun. A baby would fit easily into the confines of the mictat, but what of an infant, a child, an adolescent? The impossibilities were exponential with time and she knew that eventually she must share her secret. She hated herself at times like these, hated the selfishness that had put her in such a predicament, hated the homunculus that was growing inside her, feeding from her juices, parasitizing her womb, drawing the good feelings from her heart and leaving her wretched. Feeling so low, the only way Marcia found to relieve her discomfort was to tune into the ents channels that smogged the solar system in their empty radiation.

If Marcia suffered a craving during the months of her pregnancy it was for the littl'uns' ents shows. Normally the fatties shunned even this degree of contact



Illustrations by Iain Byers

with the littl'uns, but Marcia knew her condition could never be described as *normal* and one day her curiosity led her to tune in.

She hated the joke shows. Compères in strange clothes and stranger locations recited set-pieces that didn't make Marcia laugh, fed each other gags that only seemed cruel, abused animals and people in ways that made Marcia want to cry and, all the time, were encouraged by the manic howling of the preview audience. On one show the host set his sights on GenGen (the show was sponsored by Shikuya, a corporate rival) and, after a series of comments about "heavy debtors" and "boneless blobs" and "jellyfish" a real-life fatty was wheeled on, her features contorted with the agony of the point-five gee. Marcia flipped channels before the compère could torturously extract laughs from the fatty's suffering. Marcia wondered just how bad the fatty's debts had been, and that thought sent shock waves through her whole mining system.

The soaps were different. She could watch them in isolation, her bioface systems efficiently supervising her work functions. Seeing these littl'uns going through the motions of everyday life – so alien to Marcia's everyday life – gave them a sort of individuality she had never credited them with. They had always been merely *littl'uns* before and now they were Johnny and Sharene Jarwal, Director Robert, techs Theresa and Fernando. It was strange to think that she, Marcia, could have been just like them, if her parents had been less indebted to their corporation: being a fatty was not genetic, it was the result of intensive feeding, hormone structuring, bioface implantation when body mass was great enough. In another plane of existence Marcia could have been an actress in the soaps, playing out a life that was not her own, a life that belonged to the millions of idle viewers spread through the solar system.

Not for her the soft soaps with their flimsy, light view of life; not for her the hard soaps with their gritty, meaningful artifice, their glamorization of suffering; Marcia would be a starlet of the New Wave, an idol of the billions who tuned into a new kind of soap reality, the viewers who wanted meaning in big, heavy wedges, the viewers who wanted their entertainment to change their lives. New Wave was heavy to watch – the irregular breaks, the subscreens of internal dialogue, the strange emotions lost in cross-currents of symbolism – you had to sit back and let it hit you in a nerve-tingling gestalt and Marcia simply adored it. It took her away from her own petty existence, removed her from her worries about what sort of future her child could possibly have, what would be forced on it by the weight of its parents' debts.

Finally, Marcia knew she must tell somebody. Even then she delayed, but the sickness, the cramps, were too much for her. Not only did she have her child's future to worry about, now she had its present. *What if her illness was a sign of something wrong?* She had to know.

Coordinator grinned with a lop-sided mouth when Marcia connected with him by comnet. "Marcia," he said, glancing to one side, no doubt checking her details so he could appear to know who he was talking to. Coordinator had been a woman last time Marcia

had called, months back when a socket had become inflamed and her mictat hadn't been able to cope. The woman had been fat by littl'un standards and it had been easy talking to her. Now Coordinator was so thin his bones stood out through the drawn skin of his face and his exposed shoulders looked like some kind of external support frame. Marcia almost thought she could see his heart beating in the vacant space below his ribs.

She nearly cut him off and the picture flickered as if it sensed her ambivalence, but she couldn't, this was Coordinator. There was an honesty-compunction looped into any link between a fatty and Coordinator: his will was all, the interview ended only when he broke the link, cut the compunction. Marcia waited as he studied his screen, scanning the details of the fatty face he so clearly found both repugnant and amusing.

Finally he nodded. "What is it, fatty?" he asked, his voice gentle, his eyes like asteroids.

What is it? was an all-encompassing query and Marcia felt compelled to tell him everything, right from when she was a foetus and her world was wet and warm and loud. "I'm expecting," she said, aware that Coordinator only wanted pertinent data.

"Expecting what, fatty?" His mouth opened when he grinned and his teeth were pointed; Marcia wondered what his lovers felt when they kissed him.

"I'm pregnant," she said. It hurt to tell this runt of a man her innermost secrets. It sounded dirty.

The set of his face didn't change and, despite her unease, Marcia felt the need to continue, to say more, to make her situation entirely clear in the mind of Coordinator. "*I'm pregnant and I keep being sick and I get these terrible cramps and I'm scared that something's wrong.*"

Coordinator was laughing and tapping at a keyboard; he was speaking but his voice was blocked from Marcia and all she could do was watch and wait until she had his attention again. As he turned back to her she had the terrible feeling that the interview was now being seen by others, but still she was compelled to go ahead.

"Pregnant, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Pregnant? The state of being with child?" He was laughing at her, openly using her as an object of merriment. It made her think of that joke show that she had stopped watching, the fatty that was going to be tortured for laughs. It also occurred to her that he was not at all surprised by her admission: it was as if he already knew, as if he had been awaiting the opportunity of some fatty-baiting. "But you're a fatty," he was crying. "How did you do it?"

Compelled to answer, Marcia said, "Yes, pregnant. Yes, the state of being with child. Yes, I'm a fatty and Bulldog made himself hard and then pushed his penis inside me and came and now I'm pregnant."

Coordinator could barely stop laughing. "You say he pushed his... his penis inside you and came and... was that all it took?"

"His mobility frame moved him when he was inside me. I didn't feel much. It didn't take long, about thirty-seven minutes from entry."

"Just a quick one then."

Marcia was saved by Coordinator's inability to con-

trol his own mirth. The interview didn't last much longer. Marcia learned that the sickness was to be expected, the cramps too, although her mediprobes would need to be fed an extra program to monitor her more appropriately. The last thing Coordinator said, before cutting Marcia's compunction, was, "And remember, fatty: avoid strenuous exercise." His face was red and he was rocking with laughter, then visuals cut out and Marcia was alone again.

The impression lingered that he had already known of her condition; Marcia wondered if he had gained illegal access to her mediprobes or the files in her mictat's memory. Settling uneasily into her world, she began to scan the texts Coordinator had wired her, whilst the compartments of her bulky body continued to supervise her miners on the surface of C127.

Marcia's sickness ended around the middle of week fourteen, comfortably inside the time limits set by the texts, but the cramps persisted. Always feeling uncomfortable, she tried to move even less than normal, even refusing to go to the mactat for R&R, despite the fact that Bulldog would be there and she could corner him about why he hadn't called since her pregnancy had been confirmed.

The homunculus finally became Marcia's baby when she detected the first signs of quickening. The texts had said this would occur after around eighteen weeks, that it would be a definite sensation; by week twenty-four Marcia was worried, almost enough to call Coordinator again. Then she felt it twitching against the lining of her womb, a weak movement, hardly anything at all. She had felt this before and thought little of it, but this time it occurred to her that a foetal kick would be dissipated by her thick layers of flesh. Reassured, she strained to feel its heartbeat but could not. Another thought occurred and she prompted her mediprobe to amplify the sounds from her belly. There, among the crashing plops and gurgles, was a definite *de-thump de-thump de-thump*, so fast, so faint. Through the long weeks of gestation Marcia listened to this noise often, using various programs to filter out the sounds of her own digestion.

With a month to go, Coordinator paged Marcia and she was, again, under his compunction. This time he was more sober, it was just another part of the job, something to be done. His face had more flesh to it now, and Marcia wondered what had been done to him before to make him so thin. He explained the arrangements for delivery to her, repeated them to be clear and then cut off. With the first contractions she was to shut down her miners and head for the R&R mactat. She would deliver in the docking bay with a team of litt'l'un medics to supervise. Marcia was excited. With each stage, it seemed more real and, despite a terrible knot of tension and despair that twisted her guts, she found it easier to put aside thoughts of the future. It was all happening, and soon!

The first real twinge came as she was eating yet another fat-laden beefcake. She thought little of it, just another cramp. One of her subunits needed supervision and she descended through the optic cables and became the pads of miner 17M; she was still adjusting herself to the surface of C127 – changing so rapidly as the asteroid shrank towards nothingness –



when she realized that her body was feeling the pain again, and she rose back through the cables, through the bioface, to meet it. Seventeen minutes later she experienced another twinge, a tightening somewhere deep beneath the layering of her belly. Excitement blurring her prompts, she instructed the mictat to detach itself from her body and to run down her mining operations. An hour and four twinges later, Marcia was drifting in her mictat, watching the visuals, ceems from her face, as the irisng doors of the mactat docking bay blacked the stars out from view.

The small screen showed lights cycling to green as air filled the bay, and then a small door opened to reveal three white-clad littl'uns waiting patiently to carry out their function.

The air began to taste of that sweet difference which was of the macrohabitat and the screen blacked as Marcia's mictat started to split in two. The lower section drifted and immediately the littl'uns were beneath her, clinging to the half-mictat and indecently to the flesh of her legs. "You hear us?" asked one of them, trying to squeeze his tiny head into the space between the mictat shell and Marcia's left hip. "You just stay put, you hear? Is best you stay put an' we keep you anchored, you see?"

Marcia didn't see and she began to move, hesitating as the little medic hurriedly pulled his head from the crevice. Cables tangled with her legs and she realized they had commandeered her mictat; responding to their directives, robot arms seized her and held her firmly in place. Aware that struggle was pointless, she settled into the mechanical embrace; the medics would know best, she hoped.

"You wan' something for the pain?" asked the medic, pressing something cold against Marcia's thigh.

"No! Nothing!" she yelled. She wasn't going to succumb to medication at this stage; she wanted to be a part of what was happening.

"We gon' leave you," said the medic. "Your dome tell us when you droppin'."

Marcia took his word that they were leaving; she could see nothing.

As the contractions closed together and increased in intensity, Marcia felt ever closer to her child. Hour by hour it was becoming real, tangible. The pain was enough for her to feel as pain and not merely discomfort, but still, through the expanse of her body, it felt distant, remote.

Eventually, she heard voices and a cold slap on her thigh confirmed that the medics had returned. Straining to see around the curves of her body, Marcia occasionally caught a flicker of white movement, occasionally some dark hair drifting by. Over and over, she tried to prompt her visuals but, detached from the mictat's circuitry, nothing responded.

"You won't have long to wait, now," said the medic, a different one this time. "We've just infused some syntocinol to induce the little bastard." He laughed and Marcia flinched. She hadn't felt the infusion at all, she didn't want their drugs. Impudently, her mictat flashed at her, recommending a mood settler for her emotional fluctuations. She ignored it.

The screen flashed before her eyes and for a moment Marcia thought they were going to relay the birth but

no, the languid features of Bulldog hung before her instead. "Marcia," he said. "It's going well."

His eyes stared at her through a glassy veil and Marcia realized that he must have an autonomic visual on the bay and only the screen on her, the mother of his child. She stared at him and said nothing.

Activity at her loins increased and she felt hands pawing her as if she was an inanimate object. "It's coming," she heard, but felt not a thing.

Bulldog closed his eyes as he followed the direct visual and Marcia felt something tugging at her insides. *Mood settler, mood settler*, her mediprobes flashed. It was heaving, pulling her guts downwards, outwards. She thought she was going to die and then it was over and she felt drained, defeated, as if it had all been for nothing.

Emptied, she studied Bulldog's features, his dark, bearded face, his eyes closed, his expression serene. "What's happening?" she grated, to him and to the medics that now seemed to have vacated the bay altogether. She pulled at the robot arms but they would not respond. Panic shot through her and she struggled. Where was everybody? Where was her baby? *Mood settler, mood settler*, the mictat flashed.

"Marcia." Bulldog's voice stilled her mind for a moment. "Marcia, I must explain." A terrible chill cut through her, the accumulated pain she had suppressed whenever she had thought of the future in the past eight and a half months.

"What?" It hurt her tight throat to speak.

"They've taken him away, Marcia." Him? Was it a boy, then, the child she had carried so intimately? "I've bought him freedom from our accumulated debts," said Bulldog. His face glowed, as if he expected Marcia's gratitude.

"How? What's happened?" It hurt so much. (*Mood settler, mood settler.*)

"I'm going to be working for GenGen," he explained. "More of me than before. It will pay off my debts and it will leave the baby with little debt of his own. It was the only way."

"But what has happened?"

"He's been opted into one of the company crêches in Elysium, a nice place, he'll do well there. *He's going to live a normal life.* That's worth everything."

It still meant little to Marcia. They had taken her baby, the baby who might be her son only she didn't really know – although Bulldog had been present at the birth, Marcia had not.

"I'm going to work in research and production," continued Bulldog, clearly wanting Marcia to see how big his sacrifice had been. "The company are going to grow me continuously, subdividing my body into compartments where they can test new techniques and substances, others where they can grow and harvest new cultures of drugs and vaccines. I'm going to be a pharmaceutical production line, Marcia. I'm going to be bigger than any human being has ever been before. And all for our baby, Marcia my love, all for us."

"How could you do it?" Marcia's voice was distant, detached; the pain was finally close within her, fogging everything in a white semen-mist.

"I will survive," said Bulldog. "The body is merely a vehicle for the consciousness – I'll cope." Then, staring out of the tiny screen, he seemed to realize what she had meant. "It hurts me too, Marcia. I don't

like what I've done to you – there's a place inside of me that will hurt forever." Maybe that was true, maybe he *did* hurt, but as Marcia studied his features she knew that he had cut off that piece of discomfort, compartmentalized it into some subunit of his mind so that it might as well not exist.

Her withered muscles fuelled by anger, Marcia lifted an arm and pressed the manual switch that blanked the screen, blanked Bulldog, finally, from her life.

Mood settler, mood settler, the mediprobe still flashed. She hesitated and then said, "Mediprobe, yes." An infuser approached her arm and jolted a dose of settler across the surface of her skin. It permeated her senses rapidly, quelled her hatred of the man who had seeded her womb. She asked the 'probe for another dose. Some day, these drugs might come from one of the fleshy drug-producing compartments of Bulldog's body and then he would once again be entering Marcia, giving her his juices. She looked forward to that day, as the drugs lifted her from her twisting, agonizing pain.

Drifting, she reached out once again and switched the screen to an ents channel, any channel. The scene was a high view of a macrohabitat, maybe Elysium, maybe not; swarms of little people filled the walkways on journeys from A to B, B to A. Drugged, drifting, Marcia watched them, smiled at their busy-bee antics. She thought of her child – her son, she was sure of that now. The littl'uns could be cute in their own frantic little way. Marcia drifted and stared at all the little people in their big, big world.

IMAGINARY PEOPLE

(Avatars of Dr Shade?)

Alice, Asterix, Dick Barton, Batman, Biggles, Sexton Blake, James Bond, William Brown, Billy Bunter, Nick Carter, Professor Challenger, Conan the Barbarian, Jerry Cornelius, Robinson Crusoe, Dan Dare, Count Dracula, Bulldog Drummond, Fantomas, Victor Frankenstein, Dr Fu Manchu, Dorothy Gale, Gandalf, Flash Gordon, Lemuel Gulliver, Richard Hannay, Jeff Hawke, Sherlock Holmes, Howard the Duck, the Invisible Man, Dr Jekyll, Indiana Jones, Kai Lung, King Kong, Captain Kirk, Arsene Lupin, Mad Max, Captain Marvel, Mowgli, Captain Nemo, the Wizard of Oz, Peter Pan, Allan Quatermain, Professor Quatermass, A.J. Raffles, Frank Reade, Perry Rhodan, Buck Rogers, Rupert Bear, the Saint, Doc Savage, the Scarlet Pimpernel, the Shadow, She-Who-Must-be-Obeyed, Superman, Dr Syn, Tarzan, Dick Tracy, Dr Who, Nero Wolfe and Zorro...

All of the above and over a thousand others have detailed entries in **David Pringle's** entertaining reference book *Imaginary People: A Who's Who of Modern Fictional Characters* (Grafton Books, 1987, hardcover, £14.95), which contains over 500 pages of vital information. See pages 7-8 of Kim Newman's story "The Original Dr Shade" (*Interzone* 36) for an apocryphal sample entry.

The publishers have now made several hundred copies of the hardback first edition of this book available to *Interzone* readers at a knock-down price. Order yours from us at **just £6**, postage and packing included – less than half the original cover price of £14.95. Make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone* and send them to **124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU**. The above price of £6 is good for UK residents only; persons overseas please send £7.50 (USA \$12 seamail).

'A fictional Valhalla where the characters never die... a fascinating companion' – *The Listener*

Photo of Keith Brooke by Howard Jones



Keith Brooke wrote "The Mother" (*IZ* 37) and a couple of earlier *Interzone* stories. He has also sold fiction to the new magazine, *R.E.M.* His work tends to be refreshingly varied in setting and mood. He'll be 24 this year, and no doubt he has many more surprising tales in store for us.

Dilation Sleep

Alastair Reynolds

Spacers tell people that the worst aspect of star-flight is revival. They speak the truth, I think. They gave us dreams while the machines warmed us up and mapped our bodies for cell-damage. We felt no anxiety or fear, detached from our physical selves and adrift in generated fantasies.

In my dream I was joined by the cybernetic imago of Katia, my wife, and we found ourselves within a computer-constructed sensorium. An insect, I felt my six thin legs propelling me into a wide and busy chamber. Four worker ants were there, crouched in stiff mechanical postures. With compound vision I studied these new companions, observing the nearest deposit a pearly egg from its abdomen. A novel visceral sense told me that I, too, contained a ready egg.

"We're a god among them," I told my wife's imago.

"We are *Myrmecia Gulosa*," she whispered into my brain. "The Bulldog ant. You see the queen, and her winged male?"

"Yes."

"Those maggoty things in the corner of the cell are the queen's larvae. Her worker is about to feed them."

"Feed them with what?"

"His egg, my darling."

I rotated my sleek, mandibled head. "And will I also?"

"Naturally! A worker's duty is always to serve his queen. Of course... you may exit this environ, if you choose. But you must remain in reefersleep for three more hours."

"Three hours... might as well be centuries," I said.

"Then change it. Something less... alien."

My imago dissolved the scenario, the universe. I floated in white sense limbo, awaiting fresh sensory stimulus. Soon I found myself brushing shimmering vermilion coral with eight suckered arms, an octopus.

Katia liked to play games.

Eventually the dreams ceased and I suddenly sensed my body, cold and stiff but indubitably anchored to my mind.

I allowed myself a long primal scream, then opened my eyes. The eyes I opened were the eyes of Uri Andrei Sagdev, who was once a mainbrain technician at the Sylveste Institute but who now found himself in the odd role of Starship Heuristic Resource, a crew-person.

It was not a role that I would otherwise have chosen.

I was alone, the room cold and silent. My five companions remained in reefersleep around my own capsule; only I had been revived. I sensed, then, that

something must be wrong. But I did not probe Katia. I preferred to remain in ignorance until she saw fit to enlighten me as to our situation.

I hauled myself from the open reefer and took faltering steps out of the room. It was several minutes before I felt confident to do anything more ambitious than that.

I stumbled to the nearby healthbay and then exercised with galvanic activators, pushing my muscles beyond the false limits of apparent exhaustion. Then I showered and dressed, taking the expediency of wearing a thermosuit beneath my overalls. Breakfast consisted of fried ham and edam slices, followed by garlic croissants, washed down with chilled passion fruit and lemon tea.

Why was I not concerned to discover our difficulty? Simply because the mere fact of revival told me that it could not be compellingly urgent. Any situation incident upon a light-skimming starship which does not instantly destroy it – probably in a flash of exotic bosons – will act on such an extended timescale that the mainbrain-crew overmind will have days or weeks to engineer a solution.

I knew we were not home, and that therefore something was wrong. But for a moment it was good simply to lie back in the kitchen and allow the music of Roedelius to envelop me, and to revel in this condition called life. To simply suck air into my old lungs.

I who had been dead, or near death for so long.

"Some more, Uri?" asked my wife's imago.

I was alone apart from a servitor. It was a dumb-bell shaped drone hovering on silently energized levitation fields above the metal floor. Extruding a manipulator from the matte gold surface of its upper spheroid, it offered me the jug of pale juice.

Subvocally I enabled my entoptic imago inductor. The implant supplied the visual and tactile stimuli necessary to fully realize the imago, the tuple-ensemble of Katia, drawing its simulation from the ship's mainbrain. Bright grids and circles interrupted my ocular field, then meshed and thickened to form my wife, frozen and lifeless but apparently solid. Copyright symbols denoting the implant company flashed then faded. I locked her entoptic ghost over the dull form of the servitor, its compact size easily concealed within her body-space. Her blunt silver hair fell around a narrow pale face, black lips pursed like a doll and eyes staring right through me. Her clasped hands emerged from a long hooded scarlet gown inlaid around the shoulder with the insignia of the Mixmaster geneticists, a pair of hands holding a cat's

cradle of DNA. My wife was a geneticist to the marrow; a virtual pariah on Yellowstone where cybernetics was the primary creed. As the mainbrain-generated program took hold she grew vivacious and smiled, and her hand appeared now to grasp the jug.

"I was tiring of tuple-space, my darling."

"I'm not comfortable with this," I admitted. "Katia – my actual Katia – despised the whole idea of you. This illusion would have especially sickened her."

"It doesn't sicken me," Katia said.

"It ought to! Aren't your personalities supposed to be the same?"

"Our Hilbert maps are fully convergent, yes..." Katia paused. "You're actual wife's loathing of this type of representation was, of course, a high-level consequence of her personality, a response predicated on deeper behavioural routines. But a far more significant trait was her marked lack of intense self-loathing. For me, therefore, to despise myself, would be a truly inaccurate response."

She smiled, as if the point was settled. So infuriatingly like her original.

"I see that," I said dubiously. The imago had been against my actual wife's desire. When the Melding Plague hit us I saw my chance of escape via this craft (Katia was unable to become a crewperson), and surreptitiously set about digitizing my wife's personality. The implant did all the hard work, assembling a behaviour-map of Katia whenever we were together, studying her through the conduits of my own senses. The simulation grew slowly, limited by the memory capacity of the implant. But each day I downloaded more of her into an Institute mainbrain, performing this routine for weeks on end, doubtless to some suspicion from Katia. When I had completed my clandestine work I grafted the copy over the mind of the ship. It lacked her memories, of course, but I went to the expense and danger of having my own trawled and substituted instead, using software routines to perform the gender inversion. Katia's personality only assumes dominance when I am in rapport with the vessel; I don't doubt that the other crewpersons also brought their own fictions aboard. Those I prefer not to think about. They smack of adultery.

A lie, then. But my entire life has been a lie, and she is simply the most recent aspect. God forbid that my true Katia should ever become cognizant of her imago! They were doppelgängers, and their meeting would prove appropriately disastrous – for me, at least.

She had awoken me without awaking any of the other crewpersons. Janos, Kaj, Hilda, Yul and Karlos still remained in reefersleep, displaying no signs of imminent thaw.

I upped from the table decisively. "Thank you, Katia. I'll take a stroll, admire the view."

"I must discuss something with you," Katia said. "But I suppose it will wait a few minutes."

"Ah," I said, grinning. "You want to keep me in suspense."

"Nothing of the sort, darling. Is the music fine?"

"Music fine," I answered, exiting the kitchen.

I entered a bending hexagonal corridor, bathed in dull ochre light. A node of Roedelius chased me, humming from piezoacoustic panels in the walls. The gravity which held me to the floor arose from our



Illustrations by Mike Hadley

one-gee thrust, and not from the centrifugal spin of the lifiesystem. (Otherwise the vertical and horizontal axes would have been interchanged.) This fact told me that we were not at home; not approaching the cluster of carousels and asteroids called Shiphaven, in the Trojan point which trailed Jupiter. We were still on stardrive, still climbing up or down from the slowtime of lightspeed.

We might be anywhere between Epsilon Eridani and Solspace.

My stroll carried me away from the core of the vessel to her skin, where the hot neutron sleet wafted past us. The parts of the vessel through which I travelled grew darker and more machinelike, colder and less familiar. Irrationally, I began to imagine that I was being pursued and observed.

I have never enjoyed either solitude or the dark. I was a fool, then, to address this fear by turning around. Yet the hairs on my neck were bristling and my sweat had become chilled.

Most of the radial corridor was dark, apart from the miserly locus of light which had followed me like a halo. Nonetheless, it was still possible to make out a darker thing looming in the distance, almost lost in the convergence of the walls.

I was not alone.

It was a figure, a silhouette, regarding me. Not Katia's imago, for sure.

I felt a brief terror. "Katia," I croaked. "Full lights, please."

I jammed shut my eyes as the bright actinics snapped on. Red retinal ghosts slowly faded, I reopened them, not much more than a second later. But my watcher had gone.

I slowly emptied my lungs. I was wise enough not to leap to conclusions. This was not necessarily what it seemed. After all, I had only just emerged from reefersleep, after several years of cryonic cellstasis. I was bound to be a little jittery, a little open to subconscious suggestion.

It seemed I was utterly alone. I vowed, shakily, to put the experience immediately out of mind.

Ten minutes later I had reached the outer hull, and was in naked space. Or rather, seeing through the proxy eyes of a drone, clamped on the outside with spidery grappling feet. The machine's camera head was peering through a porthole, into the room where I sat goggled up for cybervision. I looked pale and strained, but I did not have company.

I looked away from the porthole, towards the bow of the ship. The vessel, the *Wild Pallas*, was a ramliner – a nearlight human-rated starship. Most of what I saw, therefore, was dense neutron shielding. The vessel required protons for its bosonic drive process. Ahead, a graser beam swept space and stripped deuterium nuclei into protons and neutrons. Our gauss scoop sifted free the protons and focused them into the heart of the ship. The neutral baryons were channelled around the hull in a lethal radiative rain, diverted clear of the lifiesystem and its fragile payload of cellstasis sleepers. The drone sensed the flux and passed the data to me in terms of a swirling roseate aura, as if we were diving down the gullet of the universe.

To the rear, things were eclipsed by the glow of the

exhaust. Gamma shields burned Cherenkov blue. Within the ship, the proton harvest was extremely short-lived. Fields targeted the protons into a beam, lancing through a swarming cloud of heavy monopoles. The relativistic protons were decelerated and slewed into the magnetic nodes. Inside each monopole was a shell of bosons which coaxed the protons to disintegrate. This was the power source of a ramliner.

I had studied all the tech before signing up for the overmind partnership, the human-cybernetic steering committee which commanded this vessel. When I say studied I mean that I had downloaded certain eidetic documents furnished by the Macro which owned the ship. These eidetics entered my memory at an almost intuitive level, programmed of course to fade once my contract expired. They told me everything that I needed to know and little else. We carried nine hundred reefersleep passengers and we crew comprised six humans, each of whom was an expert in one or more areas of starflight theory. My own specialties were scoop subsystems – gauss collimators and particle ablation shields – and shipboard (inflight) medicare. The computer which wore the masque of Katia was also equipped for these zones of expertise, but it was deficient – so the cybertechs said – in human heuristic thought modes. We were therefore its Heuristic Resources – peripherals orbiting the hard glittering core of its machine consciousness.

Crewpersons thus rode at a more reduced level of reefersleep than our passengers: a little warmer, a little closer to the avalanche of cell death which is life. The computer could interrogate us via cyberlink without complete revival. Our dreams, therefore, would be dreams where matter and number flowed in technological tsunami.

I altered the drone telemetry, so that the neutron-wind became invisible. Looking beyond, I saw no stars at all. Einsteinian distortion was squashing them up fore and aft, concealed by the flared ends of the ship. We were still accelerating toward lightspeed.

"Well?" I asked, much later.

"As you know, we've yet to reach midpoint. In fact we will not reach home for another three years of shiptime."

"Is this a technical problem?"

"Not strictly. I'm afraid it's medical. Which is why I was forced to bring you out of reefersleep between systems. Like the view, my darling?"

"Are you joking? An empty universe with no stars? It was the gloomiest thing I can remember."

I was back in the coldroom where the six reefers of the crew were stored. Katia's data ghost stood at my side, and Mozart warmed our spirits. Mozart's joyous familiarity drowned out all the faint distant sounds of the ship, and the frank necessity of this annoyed me greatly. I was not normally prone to nervousness.

"Janos is sick," explained Katia. "He must have contracted the Melding Plague on Yellowstone. Unless we act now he won't survive the rest of the journey. He needs emergency surgery."

"He's sick?" I shrugged. "Too bad. But SOP on this is clear, Katia. Freeze him down further, lock the condition in stasis." I leaned over the smooth side of Janos's reefer, examining the bio-med display car-

touche under its coffin-lid rim. The reefer resembled a giant chrome chrysalis or silver-fish, anchored by its head to a coiled nexus of umbilicals. It was a hexagonal fluted box within which lay Janos. His inert form was dimly visible under the frosted clear lid.

"Normally, that would be our wisest course of action. Earthside med skills will certainly outmode our own. But in this instance the rules must be contravened. Janos can't survive, even at emergency levels of reefersleep. You know about the Melding Plague."

I did. We all knew about it only too well, for it had crippled Yellowstone. The Melding Plague was a biocybernetic virus, something new to our experience. Yellowstone's intensely cybernetic society had crumbled at the nanomolecular level, the level of our computers and implants. The Melding Plague had caused our nanomachinery to grow malign.

I permitted Katia to explain, walking to the kitchen and preparing salami rolls, stepping briskly through the dim corridors.

All crewpersons were fitted with such implants. Through these data-windows we interfaced with the machinery of the reefers and the mind of the ship as the ramliner cruised from star to star. Janos's virus had attacked the structure of his own implants, ripping them apart and reorganizing them into analogues of itself. From one implant node, a network of webbed strands was spreading further into his brain, in an apparent attempt to knit together all the infected locales.

"The experts on Yellowstone soon learned that cold does not retard the virus significantly – certainly not the kind of cold from which a human could ever be revived. We must therefore operate immediately, before the virus gains a stronghold. And I'm afraid that our routine surgical programs will fail. We can't use nanomachinery against the virus; it will simply subsume whatever we throw against it."

I gobbled my rolls. "I don't know neurosurgery; that wasn't on the skills eidetic." I brushed crumbs from my stubbled chin. "However, if Janos's life is in danger..."

"We must act. How are you feeling now?"

"A little stiff. Nothing serious." I forced a very stiff grin. "I'll admit, I was a little jumpy early on. I think those ants gave me the creeps."

Katia was silent for a few seconds. "That's normal," she eventually said. "Get plenty of rest. Then we'll examine the surgical tools."

I went jogging. I mapped a sinuous, winding path through the lifesystem, feeling the megaton mass of the ship wheel about my centroid: I was ruthless with myself, deliberately selecting a route which took me through every dark and shadowy region of the lifesystem I could think of. I silenced Mozart and forbade myself the company of Katia, disabling my imago inducer.

My thoughts turned back to the figure which I imagined I had seen. What kind of rationale had flashed through my mind in the few seconds when I permitted the figure to exist outside of my imagination? Perhaps one of the sleepers might have thawed by accident and was therefore wandering the ship in dismay. That hypothetical wanderer would have been

equally surprised by my own presence. Ergo the person was now hiding.

Of course, the figure was undoubtedly a hallucination. One need not be drooling at the mouth to hallucinate – indeed, one could easily retain enough facilities to recognize the experience as being totally internalized. After the uneventful hours of wakefulness which had subsequently passed, I was anxious to dismiss the whole incident.

I jogged on, my shoes slapping the deck. I was approaching the nadir of my journey, the part of the ship that until now I had studiously avoided. Sensing my nearing footfalls, cartwheel-shaped airlocks dilated open. I panted through an antechamber, into the vast room where nine hundred slept.

The chamber had the toroidal shape of a tokamak. Nine hundred deep-preservation reefers lined the inner and outer walls, criss-crossed by ladders and catwalks. I set about circumnavigating the chamber, to finally purge my mind of any stray ghosts. Hadn't that always been my strategy as a child: confront my fears head on? I suspected that the boy in me would have been richly amused by my motives here. Nonetheless I insisted on this one ridiculous circuit, convinced it would leave me eased.

Most of these sleepers would stay aboard when we arrived in the Earth system. They were refugees from the Melding Plague seeking sanctuary in the future. At the nearlight speeds which this vessel attained between suns, large levels of time dilation would be experienced. Our clocks would grind to an imperceptible crawl. After thirty or forty years of shiptime, a mere six or seven hops between systems, more than a century would have elapsed on Yellowstone. Enough time for eco-engineers to exorcize the biome of the Melding Plague. The sleepers we carried had elected not to risk the time in the planet's community cryocrypts; in dilation sleep the effective time spent in reefers was less, and therefore their chances of completely safe revival were enormously increased.

I was jogging slowly enough to read the glowing name panels imprinted on each reefer. Men, women, children... the rich of my world, able to pay for this exorbitant journey into a brighter future. I thought of the less wealthy, those who could not even afford spaces in the cryocrypts. I thought of the long queues of people waiting to see surgeons, people like Katia, anxious to lose their implants before the disease reached them. They would pay with what they could; organs or prosthetics or memories. Or if they chose not to pay they might consider becoming crew. My people made good crew-fodder. It called for a certain degree of yearning desperation to accept direct interfacing with the mainbrain. The hard price of our bargain was the simple fact that our reduced state of reefersleep meant we would continue to age, as we slept away the years.

This was not a bargain Katia had felt she could make. And I had known that I could not stand to lose my implants. Thus the Melding Plague touched us.

I felt bitterness, and this was welcome to me. I was happy to find familiar anxieties polluting my thoughts. I cast a dismissive glance over my shoulder, back along the curving ranks of sleepers I had already passed.

I was being followed.

The shadow was pounding along the walkway, halfway around the great curve of the chamber. I could barely see it, just a man-shaped black aperture in the distance.

I quickened my pace. Only my feet thudded in the silence. Yet my chaser was also running faster. I felt sick with fright. I summoned Katia, but after alerting her was unable to grasp a sentence, a command, anything. The faceless silhouette seemed to be gaining on me.

Faceless was right. It had no features, no detail.

Eventually I reached an exit. The airlock sequence amputated the chamber from me. I did not stop running, even when I realized that the doors behind me were remaining closed. The shadow-man remained with the sleepers.

But I had seen enough. It was not human. Just a man-shaped hole, a spectre.

I found the quickest route back to the command deck of the *Wild Pallas*. Immediately I ordered Katia to begin a rigorous search for intruders, though I knew of course that no intruder could have escaped her attention thus far. My Katia was omniscient. She would have known the exact location of every rat, every fly, aboard the craft; except that aboard the ship there were no flies, no rats.

I knew that the shadow was not a revived sleeper. None of the reefers had been opened or vacated. A stowaway was out of the question – what was there to eat or drink, apart from the supplies dispensed by the computer?

My mind veered towards the illogical. Could someone have entered the ship during its flight – someone dressed as a chameleon? That imagined intruder would have somehow had to achieve invisibility from Katia's eyes. Clearly impossible, even disregarding the unlikely manoeuvres required to match our velocity and position undetected.

I chewed on my lip, aware that each second of indecision counted against Janos. For my own defence, Katia would permit me access to a low-yield excimer pistol, provided of course that the existence of the intruder was proven. Alternatively, I might best confront the situation by not confronting it. I could perform surgery on Janos without straying into those regions of the ship that the intruder had apparently claimed as its haunt. In a day or so, therefore, this ordeal might be over, and I could re-enter reefer sleep. The most faceless, inhuman entities I would have to contend with upon my next revival would be Sol-space Axis customs officials. Let them worry about the unseen extra passenger. Hadn't the shadow permitted me safe slumber so far?

I chuckled, though to my ears it sounded more like a death-rattle. I was still frightened, but for once my hands had stopped playing arpeggios on the keys of an invisible piano.

I absorbed myself in technical eidetics, outlining the medical systems which Katia and I were about to employ. The gleaming semi-robotic tools were the culmination of Yellowstone's surgical sciences. Even so, they would undoubtedly appear crude by Earth-side standards. This dichotomy galled me. Even if Janos would necessarily worsen by the time we arrived, how could we be certain that we were not

reducing his chances with our outdated medical intervention? Perhaps Earth would have accelerated so far beyond that the equation was no longer balanced in our favour.

Yet Katia would have weighed the issue minutely before selecting the appropriate course of action. Perhaps then it was best to simply silence one's qualms and do whatever was required.

Drones assisted me in carrying the med machinery into the crew reefer room, where my five colleagues lay in frozen sleep. I wore a facemask and a gloved mylar jumpsuit, inwoven with a heating circuit. Katia would lower the room's temperature before slightly increasing Janos's own.

"Ready, Uri?" she asked.

"Let's start."

So we commenced, my eyes constantly flicking to the open reefer which I hoped to enter. The room rapidly chilled, lights burning frigid blue from the overheads.

Janos's reefer cracked open with a gasp of released cold. I looked at Janos, still and white and somehow distant. Let that distance remain, I prayed. After all, we were about to open his head.

Katia, in fact, had already performed some preliminary surgery. The skull had been exposed, skin pulled back as if framing the white pistil of a flesh-leaved flower. Slender probes entered the scalp via drilled holes, trailing glowing coloured cables into a matrix of input points in the domed head of the reefer. The work was angstrom-precise, rendered with a robot's deadening perfection. I had been briefed; those cables were substituting for the cybernetic implants within his brain which had fallen victim to the Melding Plague.

"When you have the top of the skull free you should feed it back along the cables," Katia told me. "It's crucial that we don't lose cyber interface with Janos."

I prepped the mechanical bone-saw. "Why? What use is he to us?"

"There are good reasons. If you're still interested we can discuss it after the operation."

The saw hummed into life, the rotary tip glinting evilly. Katia vectored the blade down smoothly, gnawing into the pale bone. Little blood oozed free, but the sound struck an unpleasant resonance within me. Katia made three expert circumferential passes, then retracted. I took a deep breath then placed my gloved fingers on the top of Janos's head. The scalp felt loose, like half of a chocolate egg. It eased free with a wet sucking slurp, exposing the damp pinkish mass of dura and gyrus, snuggling in the lower bowl of the skull. I took special care to maintain the integrity of the connections as I separated the bonework. For a while, humbled, I could only stand in awe of this fantastic organ, easily the most complex, alien thing my eyes had ever gazed on. And yet it managed to look so...vegetable.

"Husband, we must proceed," warned Katia. "I have warmed Janos to a dangerously high body temperature, whilst not greatly increasing his metabolic rate. We don't have time to waste."

I felt sweat beading my forehead. I nodded. Onward, inward. Katia swung a new battery of blades and microlasers into play.

We operated to the music of Sibelius.

It was intriguing and repellent work.

I succeeded in detaching my mind to some extent, so that I was able to regard the parting brain tissue as dead, but somehow sacred meat. The micro implants came out one by one, too small for the naked eye, barbed hunks of corroded metal. The corrosion, observable under a microscope, was the external evidence of the cybervirus. I studied it with rank feelings of abstract distaste. The virus behaved like its biological namesake, clamping on to the shell of the nanostructure and pulsing subversive instructions deep into its reproductive heart.

After three hours my back boiled with pain. I leaned back, brushing a sleeve against my chilled forehead. I felt the room swimming, clotting with blobs of muggy darkness. For an instant I became disorientated, convinced that left was right and vice versa. I braced myself against the reefer as this dizziness washed over.

"Not long now," Katia said. "How do you feel?"

"I'm fine. And you?"

"I'm...fine. The op's proceeding well." Katia paused, then stiffened her voice with iron resolve, businesslike detachment. "The next implant is the deepest. It lies between the occipital lobe and the cerebellum. We must take care to avoid lesion of the visual centre. This is the primary entoptic infeed node."

"In we go then."

The machinery snicked obediently into place. Our ciliated microprobes slid into the tissue, like flexible syringes slipping into jelly. Despite the cold I found myself hot around the collar, iced sweat prickling my skin. Another hour passed, though time had ceased to have very much meaning.

And I froze, conscious of a presence behind me, in the same room.

Compelled, I turned. The watcher was with me.

I saw now that it could not be a man. Yet it did have a humanoid form, a humanoid of my build and posture.

A sculptor had selected ten thousand raven-black cubes, so dark that they were pure silhouettes, and arranged them as a blocky statue. That was the entirety of the watcher: a mass of black cubes.

As I turned it swung toward me. None of the cubes from which it was formed actually moved; they simply blipped out and reappeared in an orchestrated wave, whole new strata of cubes forming in thin air. They popped in and out of reality to mould its altering posture. To my eyes the motion had a beguiling, digital beauty. I thought of the colour patterns that would sweep across a stadium of schoolchildren holding painted mosaic cards to image some great slogan or emblem.

I raised my left arm, and observed the shadow repeat the action from its point of view. We were not mirrors of one another. We were ghosts.

My terror had reached some peak and evaporated. I grasped that the watcher was essentially motiveless, that it had been drawn to me as inevitably as a shrinking noon shadow.

"Continue with the operation," insisted Katia. I noticed hesitancy in her voice, true to her personality to the end. She liked games, my Katia, but she was never a convincing liar.

"Lesion of the visual centre, you say?"



"That is what we must be careful to avoid."

I grimaced.

I had to know for sure.

I scooped up one of the detached nanoprobe. In reality, the drones mimicked my intentions with their own manipulators, picking up the nanoprobe's platonic twin... Then I jammed it recklessly into Janos's head, into his occipital lobe.

This reality melted and shattered, as if a stone had fallen into and disturbed the reflections on a crystal-smooth lake.

I knew, then.

My vision slowly unpeeled itself, returning to normality in strips. Katia was doing this, attempting to cancel the damage in my visual centre by sending distorted signals along the optic infeeds. I realized that I no longer had control of the surgical tools.

"I am the patient," I said. "Not Janos. The surgeon is the one who needs surgery. How ironic."

"It was best that you not know," Katia said. And then, very rapidly, she herself flickered and warped, her voice momentarily growing cavernous and slurred. "I'm failing... there isn't much time."

"And the watcher?"

"A symptom," she said ruefully. "A symptom of my own illness. A false mapping of your own body-image within the simulation."

"You're a simulation!" I roared. "I can understand your image being affected... but you – yourself – you don't exist in my head! You're a program running in the mainbrain!"

"Yes, darling. But the Melding Plague has also reached the mainbrain." She paused, and then, without warning, her voice became robotically flat and autistic. "Much of the computer is damaged. To keep this simulation intact has necessitated sacrifices in tertiary function levels. However, the primary goal is to guarantee that you do not die. The operation-in-progress must be completed. In order to maintain the integrity of the simulation, the tuple-ensemble coded KATIA must be removed from main-memory. This operation has now been executed."

She froze, her last moment locked within my implant, trapped in my eyes like a spot of sun-blindness.

It was just me and the computer then, not forgetting the ever-present watcher.

What could I do but continue with the surgery? I had a reason now. I wanted to excise the frozen ghost of Katia from my mind. She was the real lesion.

So I survived.

Many years passed for us. The computer of our ship was so damaged by the Melding Plague that we could not decelerate in time to reach the Earth system. Our choice was to steer for 61 Cygni-A, around which lay the colony Sky's Edge. Our dilation sleepers consequently found themselves further from home both in time and space than they had expected. Secretly we cherished the justice in this, we who had sacrificed parts of our lives to crew their dream-voyage. Yet they had not lost so very much, and I suppose I would have been one of their number had I had their power.

Concerning Katia...

The simulation was never properly reanimated.

The shipboard memory in which it lay fell prey to the plague, and much of its data was badly corrupted. When I did attempt to recreate her, I found only a crude caricature, all spontaneity sapped away, as lifeless and cruelly predictable as a Babbage engine. In a fit of remorse I destroyed the imago. It helped that I was blind, for even this facade had been programmed to exhibit fear, programmed to plead once it guessed my intentions.

That was years ago. I tell myself that she never lived. And that at least is what the cybertechs would have us believe.

The last information pulse from Yellowstone told me that the real Katia is still alive, of course much older than when I knew her. She has been married twice. To her the days of our union must seem as ancient and fragile as an heirloom. But she does not yet know that I survived. I transmitted to her, but the signal will not reach Epsilon Eridani for a decade. And then I will have to await her reply, more years still.

Perhaps she will reply in person. This is our only hope of meeting, because I...

I will not fly again. Nor will I sleep out the decades.



Photo of Alastair Reynolds by Paul Rainer

Alastair Reynolds is the author of "Nunivak Snowflakes" (IZ 36), and the above is only his second published story. He is in his early twenties and lives in Scotland, though his work in astronomical research frequently takes him on field trips abroad.

Larry Niven & Steven Barnes

Interview by Stan Nicholls

How did you two originally get together?

Steven Barnes: We met through the Los Angeles Fantasy Society. I was looking for an established writer to give me some insight into what this game is about. How do you break in? How do you sustain yourself? When I found that Larry Niven made himself available to the public at LASFS, I decided to go and introduce myself.

Your latest collaboration is *The Barsoom Project*, the second volume in your Dream Park series. Why "Barsoom"?

Larry Niven: The Barsoom Project is an attempt to terraform Mars, which would turn the place into something like Edgar Rice Burroughs' Barsoom, with a breathable atmosphere.

How would you define Dream Park?

Niven: It's the mutation of reality for entertainment purposes. It's half Disneyland, as extrapolated into the future, and half role-playing. Any good story done by a science-fiction writer is going to have a background universe, assumptions that are at least consistent even if they don't match reality.

Who does what in your partnership?

Niven: Steve generally has done first draft until recently. I'm good at polishing. The major question is, who does the storytelling? We do it to each other. We get together and outline until we feel we have a novel. Dream Park is divided into Gaming Areas A and B. Steve is running B in this novel, mostly; I'm running A, mostly. A is the Barsoom Project, the demonstration of how to terraform Mars, whereas the fantasy game is running in B.

Do you work on alternate chapters?

Barnes: No. That's a common misconception. We might divide things up along the lines of, "Well, this is one of your strengths, this is one of my strengths." Or we might say, "I've done as much as I can do, I'm out of ideas; you take a run at it." Like Larry said, ordinarily, I would do the first draft, but this time he started off with about the first chapter and a half.

Niven: I had these pictures in my head and it seemed reasonable to get them down.

Who came up with the idea for *The Barsoom Project*

Niven: We waited ten years or so...

Barnes: Yeah, we waited a long time after *Dream Park*. I think *Barsoom Project* just came out of conversations. Bouncing it back and forth until we had something that made us both happy. So in that sense it wasn't an idea by either of us.

Who gets the final say on whether a particular piece of writing goes in or not? Or do you work so well together that doesn't arise?

Niven: It does arise. I have to pull Steve back to earth from time to time. He writes a little too purple sometimes and I chop it out.

Barnes: Every once in a while there's been something I really loved that Larry didn't like at all. But in general he will have the last word. Somebody has to. I'm satisfied that if I cannot convince him of my point of view I should let it go.

Is a lot of revision necessary in order to make sure the seams don't show?

Niven: With us, I think the seams never show.

Barnes: There's always some rewriting to be done. But it's not a matter of, "This feels too much like Larry," or, "This feels too much like Steve." There are advantages and disadvantages to collaborations. You do more than twice as much work. Each has a field of expertise they're good at, and the collaboration takes place in the territory where those fields overlap. What you're hoping for is that the interaction creates a kind of energy that allows you to play deeply. It's an interesting art form, and it's difficult. I can understand why an awful lot of people feel they want to stay away from it.

Niven: You also get two views on a character – important characters we're both working on – and we come to a consensus on what they're like.

Is the "voice" of the book Niven, Barnes or the third speaker effect?

Barnes: It's definitely third speaker. Larry's books are certainly different to our collaborations, and my books are different to our collaborations. I know there are directions I like to go that are inappropriate for the books I do with Larry. I can't say my way is right. I do know we can have that multiple point of view on a character or situation; and it creates an additional verisimilitude at times. It's more difficult than writing

by yourself, because one of the things people look for in writing is a sort of idiosyncratic individual writer's voice. For two authors to develop a voice in that sense is not a simple thing. Fortunately, for me, writing is compulsive; it's always been part of my personality.

Niven: Yeah, I feel the compulsion too, if I stay away long enough.

Barnes: I'm starting to think more and more about what I need in order to be a serious writer. That sounds corny, right? But I want to be a serious artist.

At this point I'm taking a look at every way in which I've been lazy, taken an easy way out, or settled for superficialities rather than go for the meat. There's no question in my mind that 95% of working with Larry has been nothing but a blessing to me. I would not be as well known and my career would not have been as established. And there are ways in which I know myself better as a writer.

Is your aspiration to be a serious writer confined to the sf field?

Barnes: I love science fiction, fantasy and action adventure! When I was growing up, Robert Heinlein and Arthur Clarke were my boyhood companions. I also read the Saint, and I read James Bond and Mike Hammer. Nobody can tell me that's not important writing. It's popular writing, but it helps to shape the personalities of the time. Heroes and myths are very important to me. When I say I want to be a serious writer I mean I want to write science-fiction adventure stories that ring really deep.

Larry, collaborations are something you've often done...

Niven: Yeah, I've collaborated with almost every kind of human being except the stupid and ignorant.

What's in it for you?

Niven: First notice I'm still doing my own solo writing. But with a collaborator there are a number of advantages. One, he can get you started when you stall; he can carry you over writer's block. Two, there's this wonderful feedback – you test the concept against each other. You're looking for a collaborator whose strengths match your weaknesses. I've got my Astrophysics, Steve's got Physiology.

Barnes: It's writing in a corporate

sense, and I consider myself to be the junior partner in the firm. I don't have a problem with that. Larry has simply been in the field longer than I have. He has put a huge amount of energy and intelligence into it, and it would be very stupid of me to stand on ego and demand rights in a relationship that has worked.

Is a great deal of research necessary for the Dream Park series?

Barnes: An enormous amount. For example, in *The Barsoom Project*, we needed information about Eskimo culture. For some odd reason anthropologists haven't written as much about Eskimo magic as they have about Melanesian cargo cult magic, which featured in *Dream Park*. So it required a slightly different approach. I had to find myth structures from the native Americans in the United States, then trace how those structures altered as they moved up into Canada, and across into Russia. I was putting it together in pieces, like a puzzle. There was very little written for instance on the Eskimo afterlife.

Niven: And what there was is bizarre stuff. For instance Eskimo women whose tattoos are done badly go to an afterlife where they wind up snapping at butterflies for the rest of eternity.

Are either of you into gaming on a personal level?

Niven: I've tried it a couple of times. I love role-playing games set on a computer. They are largely puzzles, and you can play over and over again until you get them right. Then there are the role-playing games done with boards and multi-sided die. I think those are wonderful in an abstract sense; it's great to have a software device for making stories. But I don't need a software device for making stories. I do it compulsively, whether anyone is looking or not.

Barnes: I feel that the emotional, intellectual and physical energy involved in playing a game is almost exactly the same as the effort that goes into writing. If I'm going to spin that effort, I'm going to get paid for it; and I'm only going to spend so much of my time involved in intensely emotional, intellectual, passive activities. It's bad for your body. If I got into gaming it would mean there were two important things in my life that were completely emotionally involved and completely passive. That kind of thing creates physical dissociation. I do not like what I have seen of people who allow that to take place.

Are you in any way aiming the Dream Park series at a game-playing audience?

Niven: No. Speaking for myself, my audience has always been people just like Larry Niven, who need things explained to them. Fortunately there seem to be a lot of people out there who think like I do.

Barnes: There's a man named Mark Matthew Simmonds in the United States who has licenced the name "Dream Park" from us; he's formed the Dream Park Corporation, and he's attempting to raise the money to build a park based on the concepts in our books. There are going to be two role-playing games, and the possibility of a chain of laser-tag parlours. There's also a group called the International Fantasy Gaming Society, who are actually out there doing this stuff, within the limitations of a low technology.

Niven: And not sitting around a table. They're allowed into landscapes nobody wants; they run across deserts and up mountains. The guys in the IFGS are using *Dream Park* as a manual. That's a little frightening, a little awesome. But I would be delighted to have generated a sub-culture.

Barnes: The thing is there's a sense in which it's fatal to look beyond whatever project you're working on at the moment. Because if you do that you might yield to the temptation to leave out something that belongs in there. I'm loth to think about a long series of Dream Park books, or even beyond the one we're working on right now. *The Barsoom Project* was different in being an exploration of what Dream Park might be doing in terms of the outside world. It opened that Pandora's Box and took a little peek; and it turns out this is a very powerful force for good. The nature of shared myth is what brings tribes together. This is our story, our view of the world.

Define "our." You mean everyone?

Barnes: Yeah, that's right. This is the world story. America, England, or whoever, has a myth about who they are that allows them to function as a group identity. It's like the US Marine Corps, which has this myth that says individual marines may die but the Marine Corps goes on forever. Religious and cultural myths may help bind a group together. We're working on a world myth, on what will bind us together as a planet, and allow us to forget about the concept of war as a way of resolving problems. The sharing of myths, of internal states, is natural. If I can communicate what I'm feeling, maybe you and I don't have to be enemies.

You're talking about replacing war with play?

Barnes: Sure. War is a way of resolving conflicts, that's all it is. If we can get the things we want without killing one another, great! But you have to realize there are still violent emotions; human beings have that capacity to kill, and you don't want to breed it out completely because it's useful at times. You want to keep it under control.

So the Dream Park concept is basically optimistic?

Niven: I've always been optimistic. I have a kind of reputation for it.

Barnes: Larry helped me be more optimistic than I was. I expected life to do everything it possibly could to kick my butt. It was Larry, and meeting people like him, who convinced me the world was a nicer place than I thought it was. Racially, growing up in the United States during the civil rights movement was a very interesting experience. I'd always had friends of all races who were very good to me, but the culture as a whole felt hostile. My association with Larry has turned me into much more of an optimist. Take a look at *The Barsoom Project*, and this dream of the whole world working together for a common goal, which is about as optimistic as you can get.

Niven: The great thing about science fiction is that you can do whatever you want. The special-effects budget never comes into it. It's also the reason I've never had a movie.

The Dream Park series could make an interesting movie.

Niven: Alone or with collaborators I can spend \$10 million on special effects in a few paragraphs; and if I don't do that I won't get the same book. The trick is never to think in terms of a movie when you're writing a book. Otherwise you'll pull back and write scenes that don't cost millions of dollars.

Larry, as well as collaborations, you also seem to like the idea of expanding ideas over a number of books.

Niven: It's just that having dipped into an idea I continue to work with it. If there's anything more that's fascinating to say I'll eventually write another story. It's diving into an idea and presently realizing you haven't fully explored it. It's training for reading Robert Heinlein.

Barnes: He may have been the first person to put down a cohesive future history, and attempt to work out every premise he introduced. That is an extremely challenging thing to do. There are an awful lot of very intelligent writers out there who leap from one idea to another just long enough to touch on the implications. That doesn't make them better or worse, but it makes them less satisfying to me.

Niven: It's just one approach. The Heinlein approach is to take an idea and try to wring everything out of it. In *Farnham's Freehold* it was slavery, in *Glory Road* it was the trek, the mission.

Everybody seems to want to write trilogies or series these days. What happened to one-off novels?

Barnes: I think there are people who have hurt their careers by deliberately stretching ideas out into multiple books. Most ideas have additional implications, but you can't go chasing them forever. Then again, sometimes an author is completely in love with the world they've created; other times



Steven Barnes (left) with Larry Niven and Kathy Gale (Pan Books)

an author has worked their whole life and made a pittance, and if they finally come up with something that works for them financially, who can blame them?

There's a certain fascination in watching Asimov, for example, uniting all of his different series.

Niven: But that's not for money. That's one vast game that he's enjoying very much.

Barnes: I'd love to think that is the case.

Niven: I do think so. I know it. He's having a ball in there. You can't fault him for that. What we're doing in the Dream Park series is to lay out a playground for the mind and leaving the gate open for the reader. Andre Norton always did that. You get to expect a closed story from an author, but people love Norton because the playground's still open when she leaves.

There's a trend toward fantasy and horror; sf seems to be the poor relation at the moment. Do you have any feelings about that?

Niven: I would say Stephen King is just as good as he's supposed to be, and so's Peter Straub. The truth is I don't follow the horror field — I've told you everything I know already. As far as fantasy is concerned, I've been reading everything by Terry Pratchett; he's a very funny man. I like some of the cyberpunk authors. In fact Steve and I

just did a cyberjock novella.

Can you tell me something about that?

Niven: There really isn't any way to tell you anything short about "Saturn's Race." It's the kind of thing where you don't want to stretch it into a full novel. You really want to keep it dense, and it's multi-levelled to the point where I can't describe it much. But — reach into the future fifty to seventy years, and look at the kind of personalities that develop in people who link themselves into new senses, like computer memory information flow, until they have become not quite human. That's what we investigated.

Is this in any sense a parody of cyberpunk?

Barnes: No. But I feel cyberpunk is too dystopic. It's too pessimistic in its view of human potential. It goes into the mind, but stays away from the heart, and the body. I think this is partly due to the kind of people who write in the first place. They live in their heads.

Writers tend to.

Barnes: Yeah, writers do. But you experience life with your entire body. When you start living just in your head it's like you've become blind and deaf and didn't really realize it. Some of the people contributing to the cyberpunk phenomenon live in a completely

mental world. They think they're apprehending life, and they're not. They are apprehending a very specific slice of it. I'm sorry, but nobody lives life merely on the level of their intellect. Some people are afraid of their emotions, so they protect themselves by thinking they are primarily intellectual beings. The cyberpunk movement is pure cerebration, it deals with reality through the mind. There's all this darkness; an ugly, narrow, pessimistic dystopia. I just don't buy it.

Niven: The cyberpunk label was an invention of the critics. No decent writer would pay attention to the phrase. Gibson was haring off into the wilderness in his own mind before they had quite finished writing down the word cyberpunk. He's one of the bright ones. Cyberpunk is a viewpoint. A vision of a future that is dense in innovation, and of a humankind that is gradually turning into something else.

That's hardly new in science fiction.

Niven: That's right, but we're doing it better now, I think.

Steve, it sounds as though you disapprove of the impulse behind cyberpunk.

Barnes: I disapprove of any philosophy that says any one aspect of what a human being is determines our future. That's a dead end. The future of

humanity is one of balance, of uniting the different elements of what we are. People tend to develop tunnel vision on whatever they think is important, and eventually that means you have no flexibility. You cut off reality to fit what you want it to be, or what you're comfortable with. Dealing with the future means dealing with our fear – of each other, of ourselves – and I don't think you can do that from any one point of view.

Niven: I do not disapprove of cyberpunk. I kind of admire the cyberpunk writers; at least some of them, particularly Gibson and Sterling. It's just not my game. I don't play it very well.

What are you working on at the moment apart from the third Dream Park book?

Niven: I keep looking for a chance to dive into *Destiny's Road*. Picture an Earth-like world that has been turned somewhat more Earth-like, at least in one region. A peninsula has been colonized, a narrow neck connecting the mainland. You look at this three-hundred-year-old colony – Spiral City – and a road made of lava, that was blasted because some of the crew got bored and took off in one of the fusion landers. They flew along the peninsula and disappeared into the continent. Nobody knows where they went. I'm going to take an adolescent, give him a reason to flee Spiral City, and head

him out along the road to find his own destiny, and the story of the astronauts who took off in the lander. It's a quest, and a maturation story. I've never done that before; I've never done a man's full life story. It's a single novel, there won't be any sequels, but it's a story I can't do in little clumps. I've got to find a few weeks to dive into it and get it off the ground. There's lots of material, but integrating it isn't something I can do on weekends and in between working with Steve – and maybe working with Jerry Pournelle, if he gets off the point where he's fallen on the sequel to *The Mote in God's Eye*. This is a contracted sequel we were writing together until I couldn't get any more work out of him and couldn't go any further by myself.

Can we expect to see any new shorts as well as novels from you?

Niven: Once upon a time I wrote a story and I wrote the ending badly. It was called "The Ethics of Madness." Here it is, nearly twenty years later, and I've written a story based on the same theme, "Madness Has its Place," and it came out right. It's the first Known Space story I've written in a long time, and I started with a lovely concept I've never touched before – a grey singles bar.

Barnes: There's stuff I want very much to write. There are a couple of themes that have been trailing around in my head since I was a kid. I'm almost cer-

tainly going to do a horror. I have a nasty, evil, inventive mind. I like nasty things that crawl out of the dark and bite you, I always have. I like to put characters in as much peril as I possibly can and give them a hell of a bad time.

Niven: And I can't do that. That's one reason I collaborate with Steven. I can't reach that far down. I have real trouble creating a villain, for instance. It isn't that I don't destroy people – I've destroyed Los Angeles at least three times.

Barnes: You know, you can blow up a whole planet, and the audience will go, "Ooohh!" But if you trap one person in a car with water coming up, and you do it right, then suddenly there's no "Ooohh!" in there, it's "Oh my God!" You're dealing with an entirely different level. There's probably more death on the screen in *Star Wars* than in most other movies, but people think it's some nice little fantasy. On the other hand, if you have someone kill six teenagers in a film people want to give it an 'X', because you've made the death more intimate.

Niven: There it is – intimate. I don't get intimate with somebody who's being tortured. It hurts my head.

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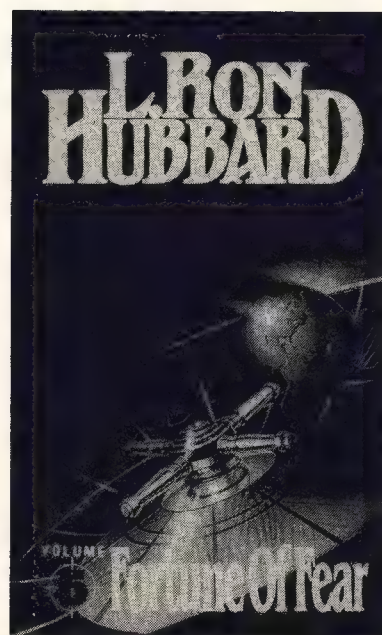
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Past Magic

Ian R. MacLeod

The airport was a different world.

Claire grabbed a bag, then kissed my cheek. She smelt both fresh and autumnal, the way she always had. Nothing else had changed: I'd seen the whole island as the jet turned to land. Brown hills in the photoflash sunlight, sea torn white at the headlands.

We hurried past camera eyes, racial imagers, HIV sensors, orientation sniffers, robot guns. Feeling crumpled and dirty in my best and only jacket, I followed Claire across the hot tarmac between the palm trees. She asked about the mainland as though it was something distant. And then about the weather. Wanting to forget the closed-in heat of my flat and the kids with armalites who had stopped the bus twice on the way to the airport, I told her Liverpool was fine, just like here. She glanced over her shoulder and smiled. I couldn't even begin to pretend.

It was good to see all those open-top cars again, vintage Jags and Mercs that looked even better than when they left the showroom. And Claire as brown as ever, her hair like brass and cornfields, with not a worry about the ravenous sun. I'd read the adverts for lasers and scans in the in-flight magazine. And if you needed to ask the price, don't.

Her buggy was all dust and dents. And the kid was sitting on the back seat, wearing a Mickey Mouse tee shirt, sucking carton juice through a straw. Seeing her was an instant shock, far bigger than anything I'd imagined.

Claire said, "Well, this is Tony," in the same easy voice she'd used for the weather as she tossed my bags into the boot.

"Howdy doody," the little girl said. Her lips were purple from the blackcurrant juice she was drinking. "Are you really my Daddy?"

It was all too quick. I had expected some sort of preparation. To be led down corridors... fanfares and trumpets. Instead, I was standing in the pouring sunlight of the airport compound. Staring into the face of my dead daughter.

She looked just like Steph, precisely six years old and even sweeter, just like the little girl I used to hold in my arms and take fishing in the white boat on days without end. She glanced at me in that oblique way I remembered Steph always reserved for strangers. All those kiddie questions in one look. Who are you? Why are you here? Can we play?

Claire shouted "Let's get going!" and jumped into the buggy as though she'd never seen thirty-five.

"Yeah!" the kid said. She blew bubbles into the carton. "Let's ride em, Mummeee!"

Off in cloud of summer dust... and back on the Isle of Man. The place where Claire and I had laughed and loved, then fought and wept. The place where Steph, the real Steph, had been born, lived, died. The swimming pools of the big houses winked all the way along the coast. Then we turned inland along the hot white road to Port Erin... the shapes of the hills... the loose stone walls. It was difficult for me to keep any distance from the past. Claire. Steph. Me. Why pretend? It might as well be ten years before when we were married and for a while everything was sweet and real.

Here's the fairy bridge.

"Cren Ash Tou!!" We all shouted without thinking. Hello to the fairies.

In the days when tourists were allowed to visit the Isle of Man, this was part of the package. Fairy bridges, fairy postcards, stone circles, fat tomes about Manx folklore. Manannan was the original Lord of Man. He greeted King Arthur when the boat took him from the Last Battle. He strode the hills and bit out the cliffs at Cronk ny Irree Laa in anguish at his vanished son. He hid the hills in cloud.

Manannan never quite went away. I used to read every word I could find and share it with Steph after she was tucked up at night from her bath. The island still possessed magic, but now it was sharp as the sunlight, practised in the clinics by men and women in druidic white, discreetly advertised in-flight to those with the necessary clearances. Switching life off and on, changing this and that, making the most of the monied Manx air.

We turned up the juddering drive that led to Kellaugh and I saw that no one had ever got around to fixing the gate. Claire stopped the buggy in the courtyard near the shade of the cypress trees. Like the buggy, Kellaugh was a statement of I-don't-care money, big and rambling with white walls peeling in the sun, old bits and new bits, views everywhere of the wonderful coastline like expensive pictures casually left to hang.

Steph jumped out of the buggy and shot inside through the bleached double doors.

I looked at Claire.

"She really is Steph," she said, "but she can't remember anything. She's had lessons and deep therapy, but it's still only been six months. You're a stranger, Tony. Just give it time."

Feeling as though I was walking over glass, I said,

"She's a sweet, pretty kid, Claire. But she can't be Steph."

"You'll see." She tried to make it sound happy, but there was power and darkness there, something that made me afraid. When she smiled, her eyes webbed with wrinkles even the money couldn't hide.

Fergus came out grinning to help with the bags. We said "Hi." Claire kissed him and he kissed her back inside his big arms. I watched for a moment in silence, wondering what was left between them.

Claire gave me the room that had once been my study. She could have offered me the annexe where I would have had some independence and a bathroom to myself, but she told me she wanted me here in the house with her and Fergus, close to Steph. There was a bed where my desk used to be, but still the ragged Persian carpet, the slate fireplace and the smell of the house that I loved...dark and sweet, like damp and biscuit tins.

Claire watched as I took my vox from the bag, the box into which I muttered my thoughts. Nowadays, it was hardly more than a private diary. I remembered how she had given it to me one Christmas here at Kellaugh when the fires were crackling and the foghorn moaned. A new tool to help me with my writing. It was still the best, even ten years on.

"Remember that old computer you had for your stories," she said, touching my arm.

"I always was useless at typing."

"I got it out again, for Steph. She loves old things, old toys. And I found those shoot-em-up games we used to buy her at that funny shop in Castletown. She tries, but the old Steph still has all the highest scores."

Old Steph, new Steph...

I was holding the vox, trailing the little wires that fitted to my throat. The red standby light was on. Waiting for the words.

Fergus was working in the new part of the house, all timber and glass; in the big room that hung over the rocks and the sea. He'd passed the test of time, had Fergus. Ten years with Claire now, and I had only managed eight. But then they had never got married or had kids, and maybe that was the secret.

He gave me a whisky and I sat and watched him paint. Fergus seemed the same, even if his pictures had lost their edge. The gravelly voice went with the Gauloise he smoked one after another. I hadn't smelt cigarette smoke like that in years. He would probably have been dead on the mainland, but here they scanned and treated you inch by inch for tumours as regularly as you could pay.

Late afternoon, and the sky was starting to darken. The windows were open on complex steel latches that took the edge off the heat and let in the sound of the waves.

"It's good you're here," he said, wiping his hands on a rag. "You don't know how badly Claire needed to get Steph back. It wasn't grief, not after ten years. It just...went on, into something else."

"The grief never goes," I said.

Fergus looked uncomfortable for a moment, then asked, "Is it really as bad as they say on the mainland?"

I sipped my whisky and pondered that for a moment,

wondering if he really wanted to know. I could remember what it used to be like when I was a kid, watching the news of Beirut. Part of you understood...you just tried not to imagine. Living in it, on the mainland, you got to sleep through the sniper fire and didn't think twice about taking an umbrella to keep the sun off when you queued for the standpipes. I told him about my writing instead, an easier lie because I'd had more practice.

"Haven't seen much work from you lately," he said. "Claire still keeps an eye out..." He lit a Gauloise and blew. "I can still manage to paint, but whispering into that vox, getting second-guessed, having half-shaped bits of syllables turned into something neat...it must be frightening. Like staring straight into silence."

The evening deepened. Fergus poured himself a big whisky, then another, rapidly catching up on - and then overtaking - me. He was amiable, and we were soon talking easily. But I couldn't help remembering the Fergus of old, the Fergus who would contradict anything and everything, the Fergus who would happily settle an intellectual argument with a fist fight. I'd known him even before I met Claire. Introduced them, in fact. And he had come over to the Isle of Man and stayed in the annexe for a while just as I had done and the pattern started to repeat itself. The new for the old, and somehow no one ever blamed Claire for the way it happened.

"You left too soon after Steph died," he said. "You thought it was Claire and Fergus you were leaving behind, but really it was Claire alone. She has the money, the power. The likes of you and I will always be strangers here. But Claire belongs."

"Then why do you stay?"

He shrugged. "Where else is there to go?"

We stood at the window. The patio lay below and at the side of the house, steps winding down to the little quay. A good place to be. Steph was sitting on the old swing chair, gently rocking, trying to keep her feet off the slabs to stop the ants climbing over her toes. She must have sensed our movement. She looked up. Fathomless blue eyes in the fathomless blue twilight. She looked up and saw us. Her face didn't flicker.

After the lobster and the wine on that first evening, after Fergus had ambled outside to smoke, Claire took my hand across the white linen and said she knew how difficult this was for me. But this was what she wanted, she wanted it because it was right. It was losing Steph that had been wrong. I should have done this, oh, years ago. I never wanted another child, just Steph. You have to be here with us Tony because the real Steph is so much a part of you.

I could only nod. The fire was in Claire's eyes. She looked marvellous with the candlelight and the wine. Fergus was right; Claire had the power of the island. She was charming, beautiful...someone you could wake up with for a thousand mornings and still fear...and never understand. I realized that this was what had driven me to write when I was with her, striving to put the unknown into words...and striving to be what she wanted. Striving, and ultimately failing; pushing myself into loneliness and silence.

Different images of Claire were flickering behind

my eyes. The Claire I remembered, the Claire I thought I knew. How pink and pale she had been that first day in the hospital holding Steph wrapped in white. And then the Claire who called people in from the companies she owned, not that she really cared for business, but just to keep an eye on things. Claire making a suggestion here, insisting on a course of action pursued, disposals and mergers, compromises and aggressions, moving dots on a map of the world, changing lives in places I couldn't even pronounce. And although it abrogated a great many things, I couldn't help remembering how it felt when we made love. Everything. Her nails across my back. Her scent. Her power. For her, she used to say it was like a fire. The fire that was in her eyes now, across the candlelight and the empty glasses.

I dreamed again that night that Steph and I were out fishing in the white boat. The dream grew worse every time, knowing what would happen. The wind was picking up and Manannan had hidden the island under cloud. The waves were big and cold and lazy, slopping over the gunwales. I looked at Steph. Her skin was white. She was already dead. But she opened her mouth on dream power alone and the whole Irish Sea flooded out.

Next day Claire took me around all the old places on the island with Steph. The sun was blinding but she told me not to worry and promised to pay for a scan. Just as she had paid for everything else. With Island money, the money that kept all the old attractions going even though there were no tourists left to see them. The steam railway ... the horse drawn tramcars along the front at Douglas ... even the big water wheel up at Laxey. Everything was shimmering and clear, cupped in the inescapable heat. Dusty roads snaked up to fenced white clinics, Swiss names on the signboards. I did my best to chat to Steph and act like a friend, or at least be someone she might get to know. But it was hard to make contact through the walls of her sweet indifference. I was just another boring adult ... and I couldn't help wondering why I had come here, and what would have happened had I tried to say no.

In the evening we took the path beyond the Chasms towards Spanish Head. The air was breathlessly alive with the sound and the smell of the sea, and the great cliffs were white with gulls. Glancing back as we climbed among the shivering grass and sea pinks, I started to tell Steph how the headland got its name from a shipwreck caught up on a storm after the Armada. But she nodded so seriously and strained the corners of her eyes that I couldn't find the words.

Claire was the perfect host. Devoting all her time to me, chatting about when we used to be together, reciting memories that were sweeter than the truth. About the island, about what had changed and how everything was really the same. She invited people over and there were the big cars in the drive and all the old songs and the faces that I remembered. Sweet, friendly people, at ease with their money and power. They were so unused to seeing faces age that I had to remind most of them who I was. I got the impression that they would still all be smiling and sipping wine when the oxygen finally ran out and the world died.

When Claire took me with Steph to Curraghs Wild-



Illustrations by Martin Perrott

life Park, I was struck for once by a sense of change, if only by all the new cages filled with tropical species. Baboons, hummingbirds and sloths. The sort of creatures that would have been bones in the wildfire desert if they weren't here, although it was still sad to see them, trying to act natural behind those bars. But all the old favourites were there as well. Ocelots and otters and penguins that the seagulls stole fish from and the loghtan sheep that once used to graze the island. And the big attraction: Steph ran towards the enclosure almost as though she could remember the last time. And Madeleine lumbered over towards the fence.

Madeleine had been in the papers for a while back when I was young and there were still real papers for her to be in. She might have been created by the same clinic that did Steph, for all I knew. But the islanders were more nervous in those days, bothered about what people on the mainland thought just in case they might try to invade. Take all that money and magic, the golden eggs. They wanted to be seen to be doing something that they could hang a big sign marked SCIENCE on. Something that didn't look like simple moneymaking and self-interest.

Madeleine rubbed her huge side against the fence. The fur was matted and oily. And she stank of wet dog. Like all the wet dogs in the history of the world piled up in one place at one time. Claire and I hung back, but Steph didn't seem to mind breathing air that was like a rancid dishcloth. Madeleine's tiny black eye high on her shaggy head twinkled at Steph as though she was sharing a joke. Her tusks had grown bigger in the ten years since I had last seen her. They looked terribly uncomfortable. And in this heat.

Steph splayed her fingers through the wire, into the matted fur. Madeleine swayed a little and gave a thunderous rumble. Madeleine the mammoth: her original cells came from the scrapings of one of the last hairy icecubes to emerge from the thaw in Siberia. A few steps on the DNA spiral staircase were damaged and computers had to fill in the gaps. As a result there was much debate about whether she was real or simply someone's idea of what a mammoth ought to be. There was one in Argentina made from the same patch of cells with lighter fur and a double hump almost like a camel's. And the Russians had their own ideas and refused to admit Madeleine to the official mammoth club.

The real Steph of ten years before had been just as interested in Madeleine. She made us buy a poster at the little shop on the way out from the zoo. Now, it seemed like a premonition. Steph and Madeleine. The big and the little. Scrapings from the dermis, the middle layer of the skin, were the most suitable for cloning. I remembered that phrase; maybe it was written somewhere on the poster.

We sat outdoors at the zoo café. Lizards darted on the cactus rockery and a red and green flock of parakeets preened and fluttered under the awnings, eyeing the shaded pavement for crumbs. Steph drank another carton of blackcurrant and it stained her lips again. I couldn't help thinking about how much the real Steph used to hate that stuff. Always said it was too sweet.

This Steph chatted away merrily enough. Asking about the past, the last time she was here. She didn't

seem bothered by the ghost of the real Steph, just interested. She looked straight at Claire and avoided my eyes.

I said to her, "Don't you think the mammoth might be too hot?"

"You mean Madeleine."

I nodded. "Madeleine the mammoth."

She wrinkled her nose and swung her right foot back against the leg of the chair. Steph thinking. If only her lips hadn't been purple, it was exactly the way she used to be. I had to blink hard as I watched. Then the little pink and white zoo train rattled past and her eyes were drawn. She forgot my question. She didn't answer.

This new Steph was a jumbled jigsaw. Pieces that fitted, pieces that were missing, pieces that didn't belong.

The clinic where they remade Steph from the thawed scrapings of her skin lay up on the hill overlooking Douglas and the big yachts in the harbour. Claire took me along when it was time for Steph's deep therapy. There were many places like this on the island, making special things for those parts of the world that had managed to stay apart from all the bad that had happened. New plants, new animals, new people. Little brains like the one inside the vox. Tanned pinstripe people wafted by on the grey carpets. I was disappointed. I only saw one white coat the whole time I was there.

They took Steph away, then they showed me her through thick glass, stretched out in white like a shroud with little wires trailing from her head. The doctor standing beside me put his arm around my shoulder and led me to his office. He sat me down across from his desk. Just an informal chat, he said, giving me an island smile.

His office window had a fine view across Douglas. I noticed that all the big yachts were in. A storm was predicted, not that there was any certain way to tell the weather. The thought made me remember my dream, being on the boat with Steph. She opened her mouth. And everything flooded back and back to when they finally hauled us out of the water, the chopper flattening the tops of the waves, the rope digging into her white skin, the way a stripe of weed had stuck across her face.

The doctor tapped a pencil. "We all feel," he said, "that your input is vital if Steph is to recover her full identity. We've done a lot with deep therapy. She can walk, talk, even swim. And we've done our best to give her memories."

"Can you invent memories?"

There was darkness on the horizon. Flags flew. Fences rattled. The sea shivered ripples.

"We all invent memories," he said. "Didn't you write fiction? You should know that memories and the past are quite different propositions."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Just be around, Tony. She'll soon get to like you."

"This little girl looks like someone who used to be my daughter. And you're asking me to behave like a friend of the family."

The pencil tapped again. "Is this something to do with how Steph died? Is that the problem? Do you blame yourself?"

"Of course I blame myself... and, no, that isn't the problem. That may be the problem with whole chunks of my life... why I can't write. But it's nothing to do with Steph. This Steph."

"Okay," he said. "Then what do we do?"

I waited. I watched the masts bob in the greying harbour.

"I have a suggestion," he said. "Let us use your vox."

I shook my head. "No."

"If you gave us the keyword, we could copy all the data onto the mainframe here. It would be perfectly secure. We'd filter it, of course. Only a small percentage would be relevant."

"And you would pour my ramblings into Steph's head."

"A large part of you is inside that vox. Be assured, we'd only take that which is good and beneficial." He stood up and held out his hand for me to shake. "Think about it. I'm sure it's the way forward. For Steph."

Claire put the buggy hood up in the clinic car park with the first drops of rain. Steph sat in the back, sucking a fresh carton of purple juice. She was quiet, even by the standards of when I was around. I put it down to the deep therapy, all those new things in her head. The real rain started just as we crossed the fairy bridge. Hello to the fairies: Cren Ash Tou. Grey veils trailed from the sky. The buggy hood was mostly holes and broken seams and we were cold and wet by the time we got back to Kellaugh, juddering through the puddles on the drive, dashing to the front door.

I watched as Fergus scooped Steph up in the rainlit hall and carried her dripping towards the bathroom. The taps hissed and the pipes hammered. I heard her squeal, his gruff laughter.

I took a bath in the annexe and stayed longer than I intended. Being out of the way was a relief. The clean white walls, fresh soap and towels waiting for Claire's next visitor. I had spent some of my happiest days there, writing, falling in love with Claire. Her father had been alive then. She was a free spirit, spending the old patriarch's money on the mainland as if there was no tomorrow, which wasn't that far from the truth. We met in London before the second big flood. She wrangled the clearances to invite me back to Kellaugh, displacing, I found out later, a sculptor who had left the carpets gritty with dust. We made love, we fell in love. Her father died and I moved in with her. She had Steph, we even got married. My work was selling well then, I could even kid myself that I didn't actually need her support. I thought the pattern of my life had settled, living here with Claire and Steph. Getting a tan and growing to some ridiculous age in the sun, letting the men in white take care of the wrinkles and the tumours. But I realized instead that I was part of another pattern. Claire collected artists. She gave them money, encouragement, criticism, contacts. She usually gave them her body as well.

Because I thought I still needed Claire, and because of Steph, I had stayed longer at Kellaugh than I should have done. The island was addictive, even to those who didn't belong. The money, the parties, the power. The people who were so charming and unaffected, who knew about history and humour and art, who



could pick up a phone and bring death or life to thousands, who would chat or argue over brandy and champagne until the sun came up, who would organize pranks or be serious or even play at being in love... who would do anything whatever and however so long as they got their own way.

Fergus was only the last in a long succession. I remember coming into the annexe bedroom in the heavy heat one morning to ask about borrowing a book and finding him and Claire together, their bodies shining with juice and sweat. They sat up and said nothing. Only I felt ashamed. But then Claire had never really lied to me about her men. She just kept it out of my way. I had no excuse for my sudden feelings of shock; I had always known that the island only kept faith with itself. But it was much harder to give up pretending.

So I ran out and headed down the steps towards the white boat, across the patio where the bougainvillea was richly in flower. Steph was up early too that morning, sitting on the swing chair, keeping her feet off the paving to stop the ants crawling over her toes. She said Hi and are you off fishing and can I come along? I smiled and ruffled her hair. The sky was hot blue metal. Steph took the rudder. The water slid over the oars like green jelly. I kept rowing until the wind grew chill and Manannan hid the island in darkening haze.

That night after the clinic I went to say goodnight to Steph. Goodbye as well, although I still wasn't sure. The storm was chattering at the window and the waves were beating the rocks below. I could see her face dark against the pillow, the glitter in her eyes.

"Did I wake you?"

"Nope."

"You always used to say that. Nope. Like a cowboy."

"I keep doing things Mummy says I used to."

"Doesn't that feel strange? Can you be sure who you are?"

I closed the door. It was an absurd question to ask any six-year-old. I sat down on the old wicker chair by her bed.

"Do you feel like a Daddy, when you see me?"

"It's like being pulled both ways. You didn't recognize me."

"I know who you are. I've seen your picture on the back of the book Mummy showed me. But you don't look the same."

"That was a long time ago. The real Steph... used to be different."

The real Steph. There, I'd said it.

"I don't really understand," she said.

"You don't need to. You're what you are."

Everything was heavy inside me. Here in this room that I knew so well. I wanted to kiss her, carry her, break through and do something that was real. But I knew that all that I would touch was a husk of dry memories.

"What was it like when you were with Mummy and Steph?"

I tried to tell her, talking as though she was some kind of human vox. About waking with the sun in the kitchen clutter of morning. Walking the cliffs with

the sea pinks wavering and every blade of grass sharp enough to touch. About days without end when the two of us went fishing in the little white boat. About how you always end up thinking about things and places when you mean people because the feelings are too strong.

Somewhere along the lines of memory I stammered into silence. Steph's breathing was slow and easy as only a child's can be. I leaned forward and kissed her forehead. Faintly, I could smell blackcurrant. I left her to her dreams.

I found Claire holding my vox, the red light glowing in the darkness of my room. I sat down beside her on the bed. She was in a white towelling gown. She smelled both fresh and autumnal, happy and sad.

"You know what they asked for today," I said. "At the clinic."

"You've changed, Tony." She swung the little wires of the vox to and fro. "I thought I could bring the old you back."

"Like bringing back the old Steph?"

"No," she said. "That's possible. You're impossible."

I stared at the vox. The ember in the shell of her hands. "Why did you drag me over here? I can't be the person you want... I never really was. Some myth of the way you wanted Steph's father to be. I can't do that. Do you want me to become like poor Fergus? He's not an artist, he's lost his anger. He's not anything."

I tried to look into her eyes. Even in this darkness, it was difficult. I could feel her power like bodily warmth. Something you could touch, that couldn't be denied. Claire looked the same, but she had changed, become more of what I feared in her. She belonged to this magic island.

"At least Fergus still paints," she said. Then she shook her head slowly, her cornfield hair swaying. "I'm sorry, Tony. I didn't mean... You have your own life, I know that. I just want to bring back Steph."

Want; the way she said it, the word became an instruction to God. Not that God had much influence on this island. The only way to imagine him was retired, sipping cooled Dom Perignon by the pool and reminiscing about the good old days, like the ancient ex-prime minister from the mainland who still lived up at Ramsey. Like her, most of his achievements had been reviled, and what remained, forgotten.

"I can't stay here any longer," I said.

"You must help." There was an odd catch in her voice, something I'd never heard before. I felt a chilly sense of control, not because of what I was, but because of what I knew I couldn't become.

She asked, "Will you show me the vox? You never let me hear."

So I took it and touched the wires to my throat. Whispered the keyword that was a sound without language. I let it run back at random. Clear and unhesitating, my voice filled the room.

"...a great many things, I couldn't help remembering how it felt when we made love. Everything. Her nails across my back. Her scent. Her power. For her, she used to say it was like a fire. The fire that was in her eyes now, across the empty glasses..."

I turned it off. I had to smile, that the vox had chosen that. It had, after all, a mind of its own. But it all

seemed academic: I'd never had any secrets from Claire.

"So that's the deal? I give you my memories, and you let me go?"

She smiled in the darkness. "There is no deal." Then she reached towards me. The white slid away and her flesh gleamed in the stuttering light of the storm. The air smelt of her and of Kellaugh, of biscuit tins and damp. There was a moment when the past and present touched. Her nails drew blood from my back. Raking down through layers of skin, layers of memory. Inside the fire, I thought of Steph, wrapped in the sweet breath of dreams, of making her anew.

That was Tony's last entry before he returned to the mainland. Obviously, he can't come back now, not now that I'm here. Claire tells me that everything went tidily enough the next day. The trip to the clinic in the clear air after the storm, then on to the airport. It was the only way out; perhaps he understood that by then.

This vox is a good copy. We have that much in common, my vox and I. It's winter now. Life is comfortable here in the annexe, but chilly when the wind turns north and draws the heat from the fire. I saw an iceberg from my window yesterday. Huge, even half-way towards the horizon. Pure white against the grey sky, shining like the light from a better world.

The four of us eat our meals together as a kind of family. Claire. Fergus. Steph. Me. The talk is mostly happy and there's little tension. Only sometimes I see Steph with darkness behind her big blue eyes. A look

I understand but can't explain. But everything is fine, here on this fortunate island. Even Fergus is a good friend in his own vague way. He doesn't mind Claire's nocturnal visits to the annexe to make love. Everything about the arrangement is amicable and discreet.

Deep therapy has brought back a great many things. Often now, I can't be sure where my own true and recent memories begin. But I still find it useful to run back the vox, to listen to that inner voice. I find that I share many of the real Tony's doubts and feelings. We are so much alike, he and I, even if I am nothing more than the tiniest scrap of his flesh taken from under Claire's fingernails.

When I originally mastered this vox, the first thing I did was to run it back ten years to that summer, that day. Tony – the real Tony – had the vox with him when Steph drowned; the vibrations of the storm must have tripped it to record.

You can hear the flat boom of the water. The thump of the waves against the useless upturned hull. Tony's shuddering breath. Steph's voice is there too, the old Steph that I will never know, carried into the circuits by some trick of the vox: *I'm cold, Daddeeee. Please help. I can't stay up. The cold. Hurts. Achès. Hurts. Please, Daddy. Can you help me, Daddy? Can you?*

But it was all a long time ago. I can't erase the memory, but I don't think I'll ever replay it again.

Ian R. MacLeod wrote "Through" (IZ 30) and "Well-Loved" (IZ 34), both of which were appreciated by many of our readers. He lives in the West Midlands, and has recently made some sales to American magazines.

COMMENT

The Island Mentality

Charles Platt

"The human race is going to split off into a minority who travel into space – people who are smart, able, healthy, and fast on their feet. The ordinary run of joes will just stay where they are. And the human race is going to spread through space with this Darwinian elite – a type of human being who probably won't even interbreed with those back on Earth."

– Robert A. Heinlein, quoted in a symposium in *Playboy* magazine in 1964.

Most American science-fiction writers would probably be more circumspect, today, than Heinlein was in 1964. But a lot of people still share his central assumption: that colonists who go out and establish new com-

munities on far-flung alien worlds will be a free-thinking, highly competent elite, cutting loose from the status-quo, erecting airtight domes over their cities or terraforming entire planets in the cause of human progress.

It's an attractive myth, echoing the rugged individualism of early American explorers and entrepreneurs. But a myth is what it is. Having recently returned from a journey to the terrestrial equivalent of a colony on an alien planet, I can say that newly developed, remote outposts do not necessarily consist of pioneers dedicated to the pursuit of progress. The pioneers, if there are any, are easily outnumbered by immigrants who do not match Heinlein's profile at all. They aren't especially smart, or able,

or fast on their feet, and they certainly aren't a Darwinian elite. In fact, they can be even more conservative than the "ordinary run of joes" they left behind, and they're more interested in holding on to the past than in forging a new future.

They possess what I call the Island Mentality.

The "colony" I visited was on one of the islands of Hawaii. Think of Hawaii and you probably imagine a tourist trap: cruise ships, Polynesian cocktails, senior citizens in garish polyester shirts and shorts, bad music played on steel guitars. This stereotype turns out to be mostly true in Honolulu or Waikiki, on the south coast of Oahu, which now looks pretty much like

Miami. But Oahu is just one of many islands in the chain.

On the "Big Island" of Hawaii itself there aren't many tourists (mainly because there isn't much for tourists to do) and the environment is relatively unspoiled. It's also relatively hostile: tides of volcanic lava have swept away many homes during the past hundred years, and as a result of the recent eruption at Kalalua, this is still happening.

The Big Island isn't actually very big, and it certainly isn't densely populated. Its land area is slightly greater than North Yorkshire, while it possesses only one-seventh as many people. There are few roads, mostly in poor repair, and car rental companies warn visitors against entering the interior of the island.

Here, then, is a remote place inhabited almost entirely by "colonists" who immigrated during the past fifty years. Most of them have a hard time making ends meet, and some must face the possibility that volcanic activity could render them homeless. Their American homeland is 3,000 miles away, and they have a very real sense of physical isolation.

Yet I found little rugged individualism in the people I met. They weren't there to create something new; they were more interested in getting away from newness. They were conservatives who deeply distrusted the complexity and pace of modern life, and I got the impression that the main reason they had come to this backwater was so they could pretend that nothing substantial had changed in the past forty years. Their small towns made a typical Dorset village look radically modern by comparison. Walking past rows of quaint, austere little store fronts, I felt as if I was on the set of a silent movie.

Consider this Hawaiian scenario projected into the future. You visit a newly established colony on a rugged

alien world – and find people living in simple, primitive wooden houses, because in their conservative scheme of things, tradition counts for much more than practicality. The colonists are riddled with nasty alien diseases, and they're choking on barely-breathable air, because they distrust modern medicine and "can't be bothered" to build airtight domes. Nanotechnology, faster-than-light space-drives, techniques to terraform and tame the planet – such innovations are far too radical, an offence to the natural pace of life. The colonists keep their alien habitat "unspoiled," not because it's especially pleasant but because it's always been this way, so it always should be this way, and if you don't like it this way, you can go somewhere else.

Offhand, I can't think of a science-fiction novel that has described an alien outpost in such reactionary terms. Consciously or unconsciously, most science-fiction writers still operate within the parameters of Heinlein's myth.

Yet even Heinlein must have been familiar with examples of colonial conservatism much closer to home than Hawaii. In America itself, the individualistic types who opened up the country were vastly outnumbered by settlers who merely wanted to buy a piece of land, settle down, and devote the rest of their lives to the drudgery of farming or cattle ranching. Today (as I have described in a previous column) their descendants constitute the conservative core of America.

If we venture just a little way from this dull main stream, we can find groups that are even more entrenched in their abhorrence of progress. The Amish, for instance, are a religious sect surviving in small groups in states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio. Descended originally from European Mennonite Church, they crossed the Atlantic in order to preserve a way of

life that outlawed most forms of change. To this day, they refuse to use computers, televisions, cars, or even telephones. They ride in horses and carts, their furniture is hand-carved, their ploughing and harvesting are mostly done with manual and animal labour, and in their lifestyle and mode of dress they resemble European peasants in the 1600s.

In science fiction, any colony that turns away from technology has to have a good reason. A typical scenario, for instance, is a galactic empire that self-destructs, marooning its member states at a feudal level.

This is merely a plot device, of course; a pretext to justify a decline into primitivism. But is this plot device really necessary? I suggest that some space colonists might freely choose to live in a primitive, medieval style. The Island Mentality seems to arise as a reaction against progress; so as progress becomes more rapid and impinges upon people more forcefully, their reaction could become more extreme.

In an overpopulated Planet Earth careening toward a future of gene splices and intelligent machines, there could be many disaffected, reactionary groups who would be eager to blast off for some peace and quiet on an alien world far from the pace of change. (Conversely, Heinlein's "smart, able" elite might prefer to stay home on Earth, at the centre of human progress, rather than maroon themselves in some extraterrestrial outpost where you can't get any interesting work done because you're spending half your time just trying to figure out how to survive.)

The Amish in space? Peasants ploughing fields with oxen in O'Neill colonies?

Heinlein would have been horrified, but I see it as a distinct possibility.

(Charles Platt)

WRITE TO INTERZONE

We enjoy receiving feedback from our readers, and we hope to publish a lively letter column in each issue. Please send your comments, opinions, reactions, to the magazine's main editorial address. We may not be able to reply to all letters, but we do read them and may well be influenced by them.

The Big Sellers, 7: Raymond E. Feist

by Brian Stableford

The astonishing success of the American paperback editions of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* in the late 1960s was one of the most remarkable literary events of the century, and its consequences have been far greater and more wide-ranging than anyone could possibly have predicted. It was not simply that market space was opened up for a genre of heroic fantasy which has produced dozens of other bestsellers, but that there followed the invention and elaboration of an entirely new kind of domesticated fantasizing: the fantasy role-playing game.

Dungeons and Dragons, the first Tolkienesque role-playing game to be marketed on a large scale, came on to the market in 1974. Within a couple of years players of the game were already attempting to convert their game scenarios back into literary texts, thus completing a feedback loop which was eventually to prove extremely profitable for the marketers of *Dungeons and Dragons* when they turned publisher and began issuing *The Dragonlance Chronicles* in 1984. The potential of this kind of fiction had by then been clearly demonstrated by the success of Raymond Feist's first novel, *Magician* (1982).

Feist was not the first writer to draw on his experience in gaming to write stories, but he was the first to do so successfully. Having been a game designer as well as a consumer he was capable of working at a deeper theoretical level than many of the players who tried to write the stories of their scripts, and was able to apply this theorizing to the business of literary adaptation in a way that others making similar attempts had not. It is for this reason that he warrants particular attention within the context of this series of articles; in order to make an attempt to analyse his bestseller status it is necessary to raise questions about the appeal of fantasy role-playing games and their relationship with literary fantasies.

The influence of role-playing gaming on the content and method of *Magician* is easy enough to see. The story deploys a number of motifs which have become part of the staple

diet of such game-scenarios in a manner which is carefully conventional.

The central characters of *Magician* are Pug and Tomas, two boys on the threshold of their adult careers. They live on the outskirts of a loosely-knit quasi-feudal empire called simply the Kingdom, in the world of Midkemia. Their initial status is low, but there are opportunities in their immediate environment which facilitate rapid advancement.

Pug, aided by his unparalleled but latent talents, is gradually schooled as a magician; he is powerful enough to save any situation, no matter how desperate, but he is denied the control of his power which would permit him to do this *ad lib* until the story reaches its proper climax (which, like all the best climaxes, is delayed until a proper measure of delight has been wrung out of the build-up).

Tomas sets out to be a warrior, and is likewise granted uncontrolled but potentially-infinite greatness when, while lost in a labyrinth of caves, he happens to stumble across a friendly dragon who gives him a miraculous suit of armour. As the story develops, though, Tomas becomes steadily more marginal as the author becomes more interested in the affairs of the royal family, whose members must wrestle continually with moral dilemmas corollary to their presumed divine right to rule firmly but responsibly.

The plot of *Magician* also features various non-human races lifted more-or-less straight out of Tolkien – elves, dwarfs, etc. – and such stock characters as the utterly enigmatic magician who puts in an occasional appearance in order to supply useful (but cryptic) explanations and materializes as the climax approaches in order to give the stagnation-threatened plot a swift kick up the backside.

To summarize a plot in this way, selecting out all the stereotypes, inevitably does it a disservice, but in doing so I do not mean to be dismissive or derisive. If all these moves, stripped down to their elemental form, are clichéd, that is because these are the moves which have proven their workability. They are, in essence, the basic components of a ritual, and tend to be

accepted as givens by fantasy writers wishing to recapitulate their own delight in the genre; the artistry of stories of this kind is concerned with the way these fundamentals are dressed up and ornamented. It is worth noting that those writers who set out to subvert, invert or pervert the rituals of fantasy do so at their peril; their works may be more highly-regarded by connoisseurs but will be correspondingly less satisfactory to the consumers who make books into bestsellers.

In its structure as in its materials, *Magician* observes the customary proprieties. It is a long book, somewhere in the region of a quarter of a million words. Packaging theory usually demands that such novels be split into three, with more-or-less half-hearted attempts being made to give the individual volumes some semblance of unity, but this should not be taken to mean that the basic form of fantasy is the trilogy; the only real requirement is that the story be long. (Feist, like many others, submitted to this particular publishing ritual by dividing the equally long sequel to *Magician* into two parts – *Silverthorn* (1985) and *A Darkness at Sethanon* (1986) – in order to maintain the feeble pretence that they constituted the second and third parts of a trilogy.)

The utility of fantasy is obviously well-served by elaborate extension, not only in terms of the lengthening of particular plots but also in terms of the aggregation of stories into potentially-infinite series. Readers are not easily sated by fantasy world, partly because it is easier for readers to find their existential bearings in imaginary worlds which they have visited before, but also because there appears to be some intrinsic satisfaction in the ritual repetition of the basic formula.

Feist makes the story of *Magician* lengthy in the same way that most fantasy writers do – by sending his characters on long, trouble-filled journeys – but he adds a further dimension to this process by adding a second imaginary world, Kelewan, whose invasion of Midkemia via “rifts” in space supplies the threat which moves the plot. This allows the author to make Pug's personal odyssey unusually complicated,

and also supplies him with a potential apocalypse which can in the end be averted by the narrative equivalent of flipping an off-switch. The rifts, in fact, can be cunningly deployed in games-masterish fashion whenever and however the plot needs to be moved and restrained, until Pug's magic finally gets its act together in order to provide the concluding *deus ex machina*.

The novel which comprises *Silverthorn* and *A Darkness at Sethanon* – which is all one story in spite of the dutiful sub-climax at the end of *Silverthorn* – is essentially a repetition of *Magician*, although its inheritance of characters from the first novel reduces its dependence on the rags-to-responsibility career-building motif, here represented in the subplot which follows the exploits of the reformed thief Jimmy the Hand. The importance of characters like Prince Arutha and Pug, who already “grew up” during the course of *Magician* shifts the emphasis of the main plot towards the preservation of that which has already been earned.

The eventual climax of *A Darkness at Sethanon* is a more fully-developed near-apocalypse than the one featured in the first novel, and though it is defeated with an equally straightforward *deus ex machina* it is clearly too extreme a device to bear frequent repetition. For this reason, if for no other, it is not surprising that the subsequent extrapolation of the series has taken Feist in more modest directions. He has forsaken the borrowed roots of *Magician*, leaving elves, dwarfs and dragons behind in order to concentrate on his own devices, but he has also forsaken the rifts which some would consider to be the main original feature of *Magician*; the inevitable result of this has been a narrowing of scope and a tighter focus which have made his subsequent books shorter and rather different in kind.

Oddly enough, it is his collaborative novel written with Janny Wurts which retains the most obvious legacy of *Magician* and its sequel. *A Daughter of the Empire* (1987) is differentiated from its predecessors firstly by moving the action entirely to Kelewan and secondly by using a female central character, but is otherwise fairly faithful to the template. In the meantime, however, Feist embarked upon an entirely new solo venture in writing the “dark fantasy” *Faerie Tale* (1988).

The politics of packaging required *Faerie Tale* to be marketed as a horror novel, but it does not fit as easily into the straitjacket of genre expectations as it might. Like many modern horror novels it follows the fortunes of a contemporary American family whose newly-acquired house proves to be the focal point of various supernatural events which become gradually more

life-threatening. The nature of these events is progressively and teasingly revealed as the mystery surrounding the house's former owner is solved, but by the time all is understood the irruption of the supernatural is on the brink of becoming apocalyptic.

In its later phases, however, *Faerie Tale* strays from this formula to take the form of a curious quest fantasy. The prevention of the threatened apocalypse becomes a minor matter of narrative concern by comparison with the adventure of an eight-year-old boy who must go into the Land of Faerie to rescue his twin, who has been swapped for an extraordinarily loathsome changeling. This climactic part of the story makes extravagant use of the common fairy-tale motif whereby success in an enterprise is dependent on following apparently-arbitrary rules very scrupulously, and thus concentrates its attention on that part of folklore which most closely reflects and anticipates the methodology of role-playing gaming.

Faerie Tale has the temporal and spatial limitations of a horror novel, so it cannot reproduce the career-building and long-distance journeying which are so characteristic of heroic fantasy, but it nevertheless remains a rite-of-passage story in which a powerless innocent is enabled to make his way safely through a difficult and dangerous adventure by sticking to the rules and making use of the resources which are provided for him.

For these reasons *Faerie Tale* is not such a mould-breaking exercise as it appears on first sight. Paradoxically, one could argue that it is rather less of a new departure than Feist's next solo novel, which returned to the world of Midkemia. It is *Prince of the Blood* (1989) which really marks Feist's decisive shift away from the patterns and philosophy of game-playing fantasy.

Prince of the Blood, although it brings back old favourites like Arutha and Pug in minor roles, is very different from its predecessors in the Riftwar series. It is not just that there are no rifts, or that the non-human character-types borrowed from Tolkien are nowhere to be seen. It uses central characters of a different kind and – most crucially – it displays a new attitude to magic.

The two heroes of *Prince of the Blood*, Borric and Erland, are not required to move from poverty and insignificance to power and high status, but merely to learn to exercise the power and status they already have in a more responsible manner. The only character who does recapitulate the theme of Pug's or Jimmy the Hand's meteoric rise, Suli Abul, is casually murdered by the author, presumably in order to introduce a note of harsh realism into the proceedings. The threat which the two heroes must avert

is by no means apocalyptic, and the plot through which they move is essentially a Ruritanian romance of political double-dealing rather than heroic fantasy. The setting of the romance is not the pseudo-European Kingdom but the mock-North African empire of Kesh. The awesomely academicized magic of *Magician* and its immediate sequel is here replaced by a literal grab-bag of convenient tricks which is deployed with casual irreverence by a playful lunatic.

There can be little doubt that Feist set out in *Prince of the Blood* to make a point. He is not only distancing himself from the content and character of his early works but making wholesale changes of implication to the world in which those earlier stories were set. The story is a robust action-adventure of a fairly commonplace kind, but what it takes great pains not to be is a literary game-scenario. It not only avoids invoking formal rules, overtly or covertly, but deploys its magic in a fashion which stands in stark contradiction to the way in which magical moves are made in gaming.

It will be interesting to see how the reception of *Prince of the Blood* compares with that of Feist's earlier works. He must be aware that there is a danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater when a successful formula is so radically transformed, and he must be quite conscious of the manner in which *Prince of the Blood* subverts and overturns some of the tacit assumptions implicit in the two long novels. If he is doing this in a spirit of experimentation he has certainly put the propriety of those assumptions to a stern test, and it remains to be seen how successful he will be in carrying his audience with him on this icon-breaking adventure.

The ambitiousness of what Feist has done in changing the Midkemia of *Magician* into the Midkemia of *Prince of the Blood* can easily be seen if we look more closely at the reasons why the formulas of *Magician* work so well. This is not such a mystery now that growing academic interest in fantasy fiction has produced a good deal of commentary on the “functions” which fantasy serves for its consumers. Most of this commentary is ultimately derived from Tolkien's self-justificatory essay “On Fairy Stories,” where he offers a trinity of probable functions for fantasy stories set in “Secondary Worlds”: Recovery, Escape and Consolation.

Tolkien's case is that fantasizing is not an attempt to deny or defy the rule of reason, but rather a natural partner of reasoning. He argues that we can only have a sensible view of what is real when we can compare and contrast it with what is unreal – thus we must have fantasy in order to “recover”

a clearer sight of the world as it really is. From this viewpoint the "escape" of the fantasy reader is not a flight from reality but a temporary removal which prevents our intelligence from being too tightly bound up with the oppressive immediacy of the actual. He further proposes that the movement of the fantastic experience should be towards a consolatory "eucatastrophe" which reaffirms our confidence in the moral order which all men strive to import into their lives despite the apparent moral indifference of the universe at large.

The magic which is the definitive component of fantasy fiction can, in this view, serve either of two distinct functions. It can be a subversive element which challenges and defies the tyranny of reason – as, for instance, in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books – or it can be the currency of the moral dimension, becoming the means by which wrongs are eventually righted and the climactic eucatastrophe secured.

In heroic fantasy the latter of these two functions is much more important, and subversive magic which threatens to upset the order of the imagined world is usually seen as the evil which is to be opposed by the heroism of the characters and by the good magic which will ultimately give them deliverance. It is entirely natural that in heroic fantasy the ordered nature of the imaginary world tends to be heavily emphasized in heroic fantasy by the invocation of a quasi-feudal political system in which the Divine Right of Kings is virtually taken for granted.

In fantasy role-playing games, of course, this fundamental orderliness of heroic fantasy's Secondary Worlds is further secured and guaranteed by the rules which constrain and orchestrate the exploits of the characters. The fact that the ordered nature of the imagined worlds of heroic fantasy and role-playing gaming is of vital importance is emphasized by the fact that the ultimate adversaries whose conflict underlies the action of all individual plots are frequently characterized not as Good and Evil but as Order and Chaos.

The attraction of these ordered Secondary Worlds where the incursions of chaos are fended off in a series of lusty adventures is easy enough to understand when one remembers how fundamentally disordered is the world in which we live our real lives. This may seem paradoxical, given that the real world is governed by immutable scientific laws whose parallel principles in a fantasy world can always be casually set aside by magic, but it is not; the "order" to which fantasy worlds aspire is rather more ambitious than the vulgar order of scientific regularity.

The first great writer of fantasy fiction, Voltaire, once remarked that if God did not exist it would be necessary

to invent Him. He was, of course, being ironic – he believed that God didn't exist and that we had invented Him – but he was also being serious. The kind of order which is fundamentally and worryingly absent from the universe is moral order; the universe does not care at all whether the good suffer and the guilty thrive. Human society, by contrast, depends for its preservation and progress on our recognition of and general loyalty to some such order; those who own no loyalty at all to moral order are rightly perceived as a deadly threat to community life and are these days expelled from the moral community by the attachment of such labels as "sociopath" or "psychopath." It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the imaginary worlds into which we choose to escape make up this deficiency. If such worlds are to recover for us a more sensible view of the project of human life, and console us with reassurances of its possibility, they must have powerful rules as well as (and perhaps instead of) physical laws.

In the real world man-made rules are relatively impotent. A parliament which repealed the law of gravity would

have difficulty enforcing its statute, and although there is a large consensus in favour of the proposition that people should tell the truth, everyone habitually tells lies. In a fantasy novel or role-playing game, though, things are the other way around. If the rules say that a character can fly or become invisible under the right conditions, airborne and invisible he or she will be when those conditions are met; and if the rules say that a man can be put under a spell which forbids him to lie, when he is put under such a spell he must indeed tell the truth. The significance of rule-bound fantasy as a compensation for the frustrations of dealing with the obstinately unruly real world is obvious. If to this we add characters with whom almost everyone would wish to identify – people who may appear insignificant but actually have great potential – the basic formula of heroic fantasy is revealed in all its glory.

Raymond Feist's early work fits the prescriptions of this argument very neatly. *Magician* offers the reader exactly the right kind of characters (individuals with potential but no posi-



Photo of Raymond E. Feist courtesy of Grafton Books

tion, natural talent but no training, niceness but no prestige) and sends them forth on an extrapolated odyssey in which no matter what misfortunes threaten, all will eventually be given to those who stick by the rules. When Pug and Tomas get into situations which in our world would be utterly hopeless they can still come up trumps because the rules outweigh the laws and the appropriate magic will be theirs to command when the moment of crisis comes – and when the crisis is past, they are destined to reap all the rewards of virtue, the greatest of which are social status and the esteem of others.

Prince of the Blood, by contrast, offers us central characters who already have social status, but whose esteem in the eyes of others is compromised by carelessness. In addition, their eventual success owes far less to their own efforts than to their fortunate association with others (who loyally, if somewhat perversely, insist on receiving very modest rewards for their trouble). If that were not enough, the role given to magic in the story is calculatedly perverse; although it still serves the narrative function of getting the key characters out of their worst scrapes almost all of its invocations are casually dismissed as “only tricks.” The author’s attitude is at best flippant and at worst mocking – it is almost as if he were addressing his readers

directly, saying: “Hey, guys, I’m cheating here – did you notice?” (It is worth noting that the plot of *Faerie Tale* could not possibly have worked had the same attitude to magic been taken there.)

There are some fantasy writers who have become obsessed with their particular fantasy worlds, effectively dedicating their lives to the business of elaborating a vast mountain of historical data, describing its ecology and its geography, and tracking the lineage of its noble families. There are others who have become utterly bored with the scenarios which have found special favour with the public but return to them again and again in order to observe the same rituals (and then, presumably, lament their imprisonment all the way to the bank). It is already clear that Feist belongs to neither of these categories. It seems that he is not only determined to break new ground, but also to plough under the old ground in order to make it bear crops of a different kind.

It could be argued that there is little point in Feist’s returning to Midkemia yet again now that Midkemia is not at all the sort of place it once was – but one could equally well overturn that argument and say that if Midkemia is so very malleable there is no particular reason for him to start designing whole new worlds from scratch. While each new book can be described by its

publicity as yet another in the ever-popular Riftwar series it will have the dual benefit of reader brand-loyalty and bookchain confidence to help it along, and an imaginary world of earth-like dimensions is surely large enough to play host to many different kinds of stories. There is scope for Feist to expand the range of his literary experiments quite considerably while remaining sheltered by trustworthy walls of a well-tried marketing strategy, and perhaps this is what he intends to do.

On the other hand, it may turn out that *Prince of the Blood* is as much an act of exorcism as side-turning – a demolition of the old Midkemia which will lay it finally to rest. It may be that the kind of game which Feist used to design can no longer hold the author’s attention, and that he is looking for another one, which will pay more attention to Recovery and less to Consolation, and in which magic of an essentially irreverent and mercurial kind will adopt a much more playful – and hence, however paradoxical it may sound, a much more sophisticated – role.

In either case, it might be appropriate to say: “The Magician is dead, long live the Magician!”

Note: All Raymond Feist’s works are published in the UK by Grafton Books.

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Lizard Lust

Lisa Tuttle

Under the bridge the young men would gather and wait. Maybe they were junkies; maybe criminals; maybe they only wanted a place to smoke forbidden cigarettes and tell lies about sex to their friends. Occasional glimpses showed they were just boys, really, and I was old enough to be their mother. But I wasn't their mother; I wasn't anybody's mother. Afraid I'd be prey, I tried to avoid them.

The most direct route between my home and work was by a footpath which passed under the railway bridge. Mornings, that was the way I almost invariably took, despite the people huddled in the shadows beneath the bridge. But there was nothing threatening about them; theirs were the sad, battered shapes of the homeless. They made me uneasy, but not like a gang of young men. I felt sorry for these people sleeping on cardboard under bridges or in doorways, rooting through rubbish bins, and sometimes I gave them money, knowing it could never be enough, but I didn't like it when they came into my library.

But of course it wasn't mine; the library belonged to the people, and they were people, too. They had a right to come in to escape the cold or the rain, to fall asleep in the chairs, so much more comfortable than a cardboard box on the pavement. But their indifference to the books around them offended me, as did the rank smell of them, and the personal oddness which, I knew, must be driving away other, legitimate library users, the pensioners and housewives and students who once had come in greater numbers.

I couldn't send them away, knowing they had nowhere else to go. I didn't want them, but neither did anyone else. I let them stay. I got on with my work among the books during the day, and in the evenings I went home, not usually by the footpath. More often I took the longer journey by the main road, crossing over the bridge rather than under it. Sometimes I took the bus. Sometimes there was shopping to do, or I would meet a friend for a drink or a meal before I went back to the small flat where I lived quite happily alone.

It is not uncommon for a woman in London to live alone. I lived alone, and I worked in a library, and I loved to read. I loved my life. I can't believe it's lost forever.

A stolen pencil. Bits and pieces of paper scavenged here and there. A loose floorboard provides the hiding place. This is all that is mine. I have to steal moments in which to write, and there is nothing but this, my own words, to read. Of all the

losses, all the cruelties I have suffered, that may be the one I mind the most. My books.

There are some books here, I've seen them, but – "Women can't read," says Gart.

I was stupid enough to want to prove I could, as if that would make any difference. There were some books in the workroom, where I'm not supposed to go, and I went and got one – I opened it at random and looked at black shapes scrawled on white. I thought at first it was another alphabet and language, something like Bengali or Gujarati, but when I looked more closely I decided it was not real writing but gibberish, like something a child scribbles, pretending to write. I spent far too long trying to make some sense of it, and I was caught. My last contact with a book; Gart hit me in the face with it.

Women can't read, says Gart, and it's true. For us, instead of books, there are picture-boxes, series of illuminated, richly-detailed unmoving images, mostly of lizards.

I was a librarian in London. Words from another world; words from a dream. They have no meaning here. London. Librarian.

Walking to work in the mornings I saw the homeless huddled beneath the bridge. Later they turned up in the library. They didn't always come, seldom more than two at a time, and I thought I'd made my peace with them.

But I didn't like it when their numbers increased. The day I saw the newcomer I tensed with immediate dislike and worry. He might be the one to finally, fatally shift the balance from public library to seedy waiting room. I watched him vanish amid the shelves and then emerge with a stack of books and sit down at a table to read.

Had I mistaken a normally poor, badly-dressed person for a down-and-out? I went for a closer look.

He was dirty, not simply shabby, and, the hallmark of the homeless, he wore layer upon layer of ancient clothing. A filthy knitted cap had been jammed onto his head, from which a few curls of greasy hair escaped. Beneath a summer-weight khaki raincoat was a heavy, mustard-brown wool jacket, beneath that a brown, V-necked jumper, beneath that a greyish shirt, beneath that – something about the size of a big, fat cigar bulged beneath shirt and wool, near the base of the V-neck. Just as my puzzled gaze fell on it, he looked up from his book.

His eyes were blue and bloodshot. His face was round, hairless, and young. Then he smiled, revealing

stained, crooked teeth and a glimpse of wet tongue, and looked much older. My eyes returned to the bulge beneath his shirt. It moved.

He grinned as if we shared a dirty secret.

"You want to see him," he said in a low, soft voice.

"What?" I wanted to look away but I didn't. Why? After all that has happened, I find it hard to remember my innocence and lack of fear. Surely I felt the menace rippling from him like heat, I must have known I was in danger, even if that wasn't a weapon beneath his shirt. Yet I wasn't frightened. I felt safe in my own library. Safe enough to be curious.

"He's very big," the dirty man went on in his soft, insinuating voice. "He's very big and fierce and it's all I can do to control him. I don't know what he might not do if he gets a sight of you, I really don't..."

He was crazy, I thought, but what was it that lived under his clothes? Suddenly, something brilliantly grass-green poked out above the V of the sweater, beneath two buttons on the shirt. It was a small, flat, triangular head with liquid black eyes. Not a snake, but something a little larger and more squat. A lizard.

As soon as I'd seen it, he shoved it back beneath the layers of cloth.

One of the children has been ill, so I've had no time to myself, no hope of writing, for the past week. Maggs, she's called. My favourite. I didn't begrudge the time spent looking after her; I'm relieved she's better now, and wouldn't have objected if she'd wanted a few more days recovering at home. Maybe I should have insisted. There's more to it than recovering physically, after all, as it wasn't a normal illness. She'd been assaulted.

It happened under the bridge, of course. That's where the young, single men go with their lizards, to take them out in the shadows and stroke them, boast to each other and wait for the women to come.

They say their creatures are dangerous, fierce, violent, maddened by the sight of a woman. They give their pets the names of weapons: Blade, Pistol, Slasher, Destroyer, Womansplitter. They say a woman and a master and a lizard together is the meaning of life, but a woman with a lizard alone is dead meat.

That's what they say; this is what I know: the lizards are from two to six inches long. They have four little legs and a body a couple of inches wide, at most. They have no teeth. They have no claws. On Maggs' body, as on my own, are scratches, bruises left by boots and fists, and the marks of human teeth.

He grinned and lurched to his feet, and with the movement came the stench of him, like a blow, making me flinch. It was the rank, sour smell of unwashed flesh swaddled too long in filthy clothes, but it was the wrong smell. It was the smell not of a man, but of a dirty woman. Now I saw that although dressed like a man, she was, of course, a woman. I couldn't understand how I had been so mistaken. How had I missed the meaning of the beardless face, the voice, the way she walked? I looked at her chest and she hunched slightly, holding both hands up protectively.

"You don't want him getting excited," she said. "He sees you looking and he'll want to take a bite out of

your pretty face. I'd try to hold him back, honest I would, but sometimes he's just too strong for me."

She was a woman of about my own age, maybe younger, probably still in her thirties. I wondered what had gone wrong in her life. I felt the most profound sense of pity, of connection, imagining myself in her place. She obviously needed help; maybe mine?

That was how I got involved. That was why I didn't throw her out, then and there. It was pity for her, or, rather, who I thought she might be. It wasn't the lizard; it was nothing to do with the lizard.

Maggs has picture cubes. She stares at them in a kind of trance while listening to stories on the radio, or to her records. A lot of women use them in this way. Much of what I understand I have learned from Maggs. The oldest of the children, she's no longer a child. She talks to me and isn't impatient with my boundless ignorance. We like each other. She's my only friend.

The stories she likes best on the radio, and her favourite records, are a kind of pornography, I suppose, although she thinks of them as romance. They don't work as either of those things for me, because they're about lizards. About women and lizards.

My own fantasies have nothing to do with lizards. Nor do they have anything to do with sex, or other people. All my yearnings now, both willed and unwilled daydreams, are for my lost solitude and the ordinary realities of my former life. I imagine myself cleaning my flat, dusting the books, sitting behind my desk in the rich silence of the library, dealing with routine filing and overdue notices. The things I once took for granted or found tedious are the pleasures I long for now. To be able to sit alone and read a book and fear nothing. If I could have my old life back, I'd never again wish for a man to rescue me from it; I'd never even think about getting a pet for company.

In my sweet dreams I'm back in the library, working. I look up and see someone come in, and I go over to speak to her. At that point, the dream becomes a nightmare. Why did I have to speak to her? Why did I let her show me her lizard?

"I'm afraid you can't have an animal in here... this is a public library, you know, and other people..."

"Go away," she said, seating herself again and turning her attention to her books. "I'll let you see him later."

The books were human biology texts. She was looking at them upside down.

If she was mad, as she must be, it might not be safe to anger her. I decided to leave her alone. After all, she wasn't bothering anyone, and it was only a lizard, not anything dangerous.

They say that the sight of a lizard drives a woman wild with desire. Any woman, any lizard, the merest glimpse. Once she's seen a lizard, a woman can't rest content until she can put her hands on one. Until she can feel it moving against her flesh, tiny feet scampering over her skin, its coolness nestling in her warmth. She wants one for her own. But lizards belong to men; they're death to women. A woman can know a lizard only through a man's intercession. So she gives herself to a man, becomes his slave and does whatever



he asks in exchange for a few precious moments at night, in the dark, when she can feel the lizard, set free, moving or resting on her bare flesh, and she can pretend, she may even believe, that it is her own. A woman will do anything, sell herself to a man she despises, just to be close to a lizard. That's what the men say.

No. The truth is, I don't know what "the men" say, and I don't believe in "the men." I certainly haven't seen any. All I know is what Gart and Maggs have told me, and what I've guessed from things overheard, from the picture-boxes, from my own experience.

I feel nothing when I look at a lizard. I have never felt anything except a mild curiosity and now, increasingly, fear and revulsion, not for the harmless creature itself, but for what it represents. I am immune to whatever strange powers they possess. I am not like other women. Of course I'm not. This isn't my world. I don't belong here.

Gart smiles cynically. "Then why did you come? Why do you stay?"

This is what it's like for me with the lizard:

I'm alone in the bedroom with Gart who turns out the light. I undress as quickly as I can, my nervousness making me clumsy. I won't be as nervous once I'm in bed, but until then I feel like prey. Anything might happen. Although he usually punishes me with the light on, sometimes he'll attack me in the dark, without warning or provocation. Once I'm actually in the bed, though naked, I feel more safe. Gart seldom hurts me in bed, never badly. There is a kind of truce in effect while we're in bed together

which allows me to relax.

Sometimes we talk. I talk about my world, or ask questions about this one, and Gart responds in a way very different from his sneering, domineering daylight manner. We talk as if I'm not his captive and he's not my master.

Sometimes we make love. That's something I feel guilty about. I'm ashamed of myself for allowing it to go on and for enjoying it so much. Gart is my enemy, and nothing that has happened between us in the dark has ever altered his violent cruelty to me later. How can I love such a man?

The answer is, I don't love the man. I love the woman he is at night, the woman who comes out when the man takes off his clothes.

I am not homosexual. I have never felt any inclination in that direction. When I was younger I had a satisfying, fairly active sex life, but for various reasons (a dislike of casual sex, a determination not to get involved with married men) once I was past thirty love affairs were few and far between. At the time Gart shambled into my library I hadn't had a boyfriend for two years. Yes, I did regret it; yes, I did feel frustrated at times, but I never thought of having an affair with another woman. My women friends were my friends, and one of the important things about friendship, I think, is that it isn't sexual. Gart has never been my friend.

At first when we made love I would try to pretend Gart was a man. I remembered past lovers and I fantasized, ignoring the reality as best I could. But after a short while I stopped that. I knew I didn't want to make love to the man Gart pretended all day to be,

but the woman who came out in the dark was someone else. She was my lover.

Whether we talk or make love, always, at some point, Gart asks if I want to have the lizard. When I agree (I always agree: once from fear of angering him, now from the wish to please her) Gart puts the small creature into my receptive hands, or somewhere on my naked body.

I don't find it erotic or arousing at all, but the feel of a lizard on my naked flesh is, although not actively pleasant, not unpleasant, either. It's easy to tolerate; it's not something I would miss if it stopped. I think of it as something Gart wants to do, which I don't mind. Other women must feel something I don't. Is it possible the lizard exudes some sort of chemical to which they are sensitive and to which they become addicted? That seems likely; certainly it is preferable to the other thought that haunts me, that the women here are no different, physically, from me; that what they feel for the lizard is a fantasy, a cultural neurosis, a gigantic, psychological con.

It was as I was reshelving books, sometime late in the afternoon, that I noticed she was gone. I'm sure I was more relieved than disappointed. Of course I thought of the lizard. Something like that was too unusual to forget. But thinking about something, wondering about it, remembering its dazzling green and the lithe curve of its neck, is not the same as needing something, or even wanting it.

I took the footpath home from work. I didn't need to go shopping or out to dinner; the bus was slow and often crowded. Walking was more pleasant, and it was early summer, so I wouldn't be walking in the dark. I had no reason to be afraid.

"You were looking for me," says Gart. "You thought you might find me under the bridge – there was nowhere else, and you had to look, didn't you? You had to see my lizard again."

After so long here I have come to doubt my own perceptions. Maybe my memory is wrong. Maybe, subconsciously, I was being drawn... Yet I remember no compulsion, no sense of need or even strong desire. I was just walking home, not searching, when I found her, loitering on the footpath, not quite under the bridge but not quite clear of it. When I came near she looked at me as if she'd been expecting me, and said, "I'll let you touch him, but it'll have to be in the dark, so he can't see what you are. Otherwise, he might kill you, and I wouldn't want that."

He says, "You could have run away. You could have said No."

She put her hand on my arm. The smell of her made me want to throw up. She said, "Come with me under the bridge."

Although it was horrible, and I felt almost a mother's agony when Maggs came home bruised and bleeding from her encounter under the bridge, I also felt a kind of relief because this surely meant she was a woman. Had she not been hurt she would have gone back to try her luck again, and eventually she might get her own lizard. That's what makes a man, according to Gart. Those who have lizards are men. Gart says she is a man. But I know that's not true.

Her body, like mine, is a woman's. It is possible to be confused about many things in the dark, but of this I am certain. Gart does not have a penis.

Is Gart an exception, a freak, or are all the men in this place like her? Can it be that they are *all* women? That they all look like women to me doesn't mean they are. That I've only ever seen girl children doesn't mean there aren't boys somewhere, perhaps being raised separately, or in secret. They say that all children are girls, but then sometime in adolescence they begin to change. They say the lizards can tell the difference... or maybe the lizards make the difference. Girls become men or women depending on what happens to them during the crisis of adolescence, the drama which takes place beneath the bridge.

Gart says that men get lizards and women get babies. But if they are all female, where do the babies come from?

"A man and a woman and a lizard" says Gart, impatiently. She thinks I'm an idiot, not because I ask questions about such basic things, but because I keep asking the same questions again and again and don't – won't – can't believe the answers. But neither does she believe in my reality, where sex is established long before birth. And I won't believe the most important human distinction can be made on the basis of keeping, or not keeping, a pet.

To these people, so like me they could pass in my world, the lizard is the source of all power, the lizard makes everything possible, even travel to other worlds.

After the mother of her children died, Gart didn't like being alone, but was afraid to go under the bridge again. She might get a new woman there, but because she was older, not as quick or as desirable as the others, it was also possible that some particularly strong or ruthless child might steal her lizard, unmaning her.

"Dagger wouldn't let me risk it," said Gart. Her hand was inside the voluminous pullover she liked to wear at home and she was stroking the lizard nestled between her small breasts. "Dagger didn't want to be parted from me, so when this kid came at me, and looked like hurting me, under the bridge, Dagger took us out of there, both of us went *through* – into your world, as it turned out."

"How?"

"Everybody knows that lizards can travel to different dimensions, and sometimes they take their friends."

"How? What makes it happen? What were you doing just before?"

Gart's smile became unpleasant. "It won't do you any good to know. If you ever tried to steal Dagger he'd rip you to pieces. You'd be dead meat before you could even leave the house. Even if you thought to kill me first –"

"I wouldn't, I wouldn't!"

"– he'd tear you into bloody chunks and then he'd disappear. So what are you asking questions for, if you're not plotting against me?"

"I'm just curious," I said, pleadingly. "I just wondered what it felt like to travel from one world to another."

"You ought to know that." And then, even though there were children in the room with us, Gart reached over and took hold of a handful of my hair near the

scalp, and tugged hard. "Don't you remember how it felt?"

Yes. I was beaten and kicked and dragged through. It felt like dying.

Although Gart says that the children's mother died of an illness, what Maggs has told me makes me believe that Gart killed her. And if I stay here long enough I have no doubt he'll kill me, too.

"Come under the bridge and I'll let you see him."

She tugged my arm. I felt safe because she was a woman. So I went under the bridge with her. It seemed easier not to fight. I didn't know enough to be afraid.

"You say you're different. You pretend you don't care about my lizard. Do you think I'm stupid? Do you think I can't tell how much you want it? You'd do anything for me, just for the chance to be near him. Why did you come under the bridge with me if you didn't care?" Gart pulled me by my hair, off my chair, and flung me to the floor. "Why did you come with me?"

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" I didn't then, but I know now to be afraid.

Under the bridge, the woman unbuttoned her shirt and pulled at the V of her jumper until I saw the slight swell of her breasts and, nestling between them, something green.

I leaned closer to see, and then a pain in my stomach made me double over and I couldn't breathe. I didn't understand what was happening until she hit me in the face with her fist,

breaking my nose. She kicked me in the side of the head when I was down, and then, when I tried to protect my head, she kicked me in the ribs and kidneys. The pain was horrific and incomprehensible. There was no chance for me to fight back, even if I had known how. I choked on my own attempts to scream.

"Why do you stay, if not for Dagger?" he shouts, drawing his foot back for a kick. Now, I start screaming before I feel the pain, in the vain hope that it will make him stop sooner. I'm aware of the children's fear as they huddle in the corner, watching. Well, let them be afraid, let them see what he does to me, let it warn them what it is to be a woman in this world.

Maggs didn't come home after school yesterday. Then it was dark and she still hadn't come home. The wounds from the last attack had scarcely healed; it had not occurred to me



that she might rush back for more punishment. I had thought her safe for just a little while longer. I dared Gart's anger to insist he go out and look for her. He claims to care about the children, but I don't think he can love Maggs as I do. She is my only friend; her existence is all that makes my life here bearable.

Gart brought her home. He found her lying in a shallow culvert not far from the bridge, badly battered but alive. One of her legs was broken in several places. We had to get the doctor in to set it. Afterwards I could hear Gart and the doctor drinking and laughing together in the parlour, man to man.

I sat at her bedside and held her hand. "Why?" I whispered, staring down at her poor, swollen face.

"I have to. What else can I do? You know. It's why you went with Father."

"No. That's not true. He tricked me. I didn't know. I thought he was a woman. If I'd had any idea what

would happen, that he would beat me up and kidnap me, I'd have run so fast in the other direction... It was nothing to do with the lizard; I certainly didn't want it, I didn't need it... things are different in my world, I've told you."

"Then why don't you go back there?"

The way she echoed her father's cruel questions, yet innocent of malice, made me shiver, and I suddenly wondered if she had ever believed my stories of another reality, where women and men were equals, friends who treated one another kindly, where lizards had no power. I wondered if I believed it myself.

"I don't know how to go back. If I knew how, I would, I promise you, and I'd take you with me."

"A lizard would take you back, if you had one."

"Well, that's a useful thing to know."

"Worth risking a beating? Wouldn't you try to get one if you knew it could give you what you want?"

"But lizards won't stay with women —"

"You don't believe that?" Her voice got louder in scorn. "Do you think it was a lizard who broke my leg and punched me in the face, and — If lizards couldn't be stolen, men wouldn't be so afraid. They wouldn't have to keep beating us up, to keep us afraid. They'd just laugh, let us try, watch us fail and laugh again."

The laughter of the men came to us from the other room.

"All that stuff about two sexes is ridiculous," she went on, more quietly. Her voice was hoarse, raw from screaming. "We're all the same, my sisters and me and all the kids at school. Some are stronger or meaner or luckier than others, and they'll find lizards, or take them. They're called men after they have lizards, not before, and it's not the lizard who decides. You and father have the same sex — or haven't you noticed, in the dark?"

"Yes, I had noticed, but I thought... I thought Gart must be an exception, there must be real men somewhere."

"You thought Gart was a woman and the lizard made an exception for her? They're all exceptions."

"But if there aren't any men, where do babies come from?"

She made a sound of weariness and pain. "I don't know. I expect I'll find out soon. They say it's the lizards, and maybe..."

"Oh, Maggs, what happened?"

"I don't know," she said again. "It was dark... there were a lot of them, holding me down, and I wasn't conscious all the time. If I find out I'm pregnant... well, I used to be friends with a girl at school. She's a man now, she's got a lizard but no woman, and I think she'd probably set up house with me if I asked. We always liked each other."

I tried to protest but she wouldn't listen, she knew better. Nominally I was her stepmother, and older, but she had more experience of life.

"I have to. I've tried to get my own lizard and I failed. I keep trying, and eventually they'll kill me. The smart thing is to admit I can't have my own and settle for sharing someone else's. If it's someone I like, he might not feel so threatened by me. Not all men are brutal to their women."

"But why — Oh, Maggs, why not forget the lizards, why not imagine a life without one?"

"Imagine? I know what it would be like, and it's no

life. Don't you know how they treat free women? Have you ever met one? Nobody will give work to someone without a lizard — not decent work. They're always suspicious of someone like that. I could be locked up for treatment — Gart certainly wouldn't stop them, and nobody would listen to you. And then there's the single men, the ones who can't get women of their own free will... sooner or later one of them would decide to take me and I wouldn't be able to stop him... certainly not if I was pregnant. I'd rather choose the man I have to live with, thank you."

Her hopelessness brought tears to my eyes. I wish I could save her.

We're alone in the house, Maggs and I. It doesn't matter if she sees me writing because she won't betray me. I'm going to teach her to read and write. We'll have time, while she's laid up with her broken leg, and although literacy is a skill useless in this world, we're not going to stay here forever. We're going to get out. All we need is a lizard.

They can travel, and they can take us away from here. Maggs says she knows how.

She is perceptibly better every day. Young bones do knit fast. We have grown closer, too, spending so much time together, refining our plan. It's going to work, I'm sure. Together we can get a lizard, and the lizard will get us out.

It's going to have to be Gart's, although I resisted the idea at first. Under the bridge is the traditional place, and there are so many lizards there. No one would expect two women to be working together, so we'd have the benefit of surprise.

But there are only two of us, as Maggs has pointed out, and under the bridge if there is one man there will be several. Unless we managed to incapacitate our chosen victim very quickly and quietly, the others would come to his aid, and we might not be able to escape in time.

Now I know what other women feel. I hesitate to ask for the lizard in bed, afraid that Gart will be suspicious, that he will react with violence. I find it harder and harder to give the lizard back. I struggle to stay awake, hoping he will fall asleep before me, wondering, if he does, if I would have the courage to take it and run.

In no longer think of sneaking out of bed and running away in the middle of the night. I no longer find it hard to think of hurting him. I no longer think of him as "her."

Gart gave me the most vicious beating of my life, more damaging even than the first one. He attacked me for no reason just at the time when Maggs was starting to be able to walk again. Does he suspect that we've united against him? Is that why he wants to keep me helpless?

I must get well quickly. Maggs is restless. She's not pregnant, thank heavens, but next time — there must not be a next time. I see the cultural and biological imperatives working in her, and know she can't wait forever. We must take our first chance and act together, swiftly, ruthlessly.

Gart is dead. The children are staying with friends. And Maggs and I are waiting for the night.

This will be the last time I write here, the last piece of paper I fill with words no one but me can read. I'm going home.

I feel very odd. Dazed by it all, and hurt: the wounds he inflicted throb and flare with pain. Maggs was less battered and also she's stronger, which probably accounts for her manner: the high spirits of youth and a natural impatience with my slowness. I've been so downtrodden by Gart that I couldn't think what to do after we'd killed him. I stood there like an idiot, tears in my eyes and my gorge rising, unable to act.

Maggs scooped up the lizard and dropped it down the front of her shirt where it nestled as if she were its natural owner. Then she set about cleaning the room, eliminating all signs of struggle, and giving me the firm, clear orders I needed to help her.

Somehow I hadn't thought of all the sordid details of afterward, of cleaning the body and getting it into the bathroom to make it appear Gart died of a fall; it would never have occurred to me to arrange for the children to stay the night with school-friends. But then I had imagined we'd leave this world for mine just as soon as we got our hands on the lizard. It's not quite that simple, says Maggs. We have to be in the right place for it to work, and the right place is under a bridge. Bridges are transitional places, where crossings are possible. I should have guessed, of course, for didn't Gart take me under the bridge? I should have known. She says we'll wait until dark, when there will be fewer people around, and it will be safe.

I'm scared. I didn't think it would be like this. I had imagined triumph, and a quick getaway. Not all this waiting, this fear and pain and the need to go under the bridge again. Somehow, when Maggs says that everything is going according to plan, I am not reassured. If there is anyone else under the bridge when we go, if even one man should decide to attack me, I'm too weak to fight, he'd finish me off. Maggs tells me not to be stupid. Maggs says she'll protect me. She seems different, as if already possession of the lizard has changed her. But I can't bear to think that. She's

still Maggs, my almost step-daughter, my ally, my only friend. I have to believe that. I have to trust her. There's nothing else to do. I must go under the bridge with her.



Photo of Lisa Tuttle by Colin Murray

Lisa Tuttle's one previous contribution to *Interzone* was "Memories of the Body" (issue 22), but she is well known for her numerous short stories elsewhere, plus a number of novels and non-fiction books. The most recent volume to carry her name as editor is *Skin of the Soul*, an anthology of original horror stories by female writers (Women's Press, 1990, £5.95).

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Mutant Popcorn

Film reviews by Nick Lowe

You're young, slightly talented, eager to move, and you want to break into movies fast and high. No cycling round Soho with cardboard cartons for two years on end, or making tea for girls on the phone in some half-shot blagging agency. You want to be a big-budget, international, seriously commercial writer-director with a studio deal, proper distribution, and a Leicester Square opening, and you want it before you're as old as Steven Soderbergh. And the punchline is (this'll kill you) the punchline is, you're British. Get the flibbertygibbet out of here! You young scamp, you made me spill my coffee!

But this is not a dream, not a hoax, not an imaginary tale. Your name is Richard Stanley, and your script is called *Hardware*, and that lady in the sparkly dress with the wand is – yes! – it's that chap from Palace with the incredibly naff ponytail... So how did it happen? How did the glass Doc M come to end up on your ill-smelling leg-end? What was the magic spark, the killer concept that made all the little dollar signs line up? Well, it's there, I think, but it's been rather cleverly disguised, so see if you the viewer can spot it from the treatment.

Okay, the titles come over a pan around The Zone, basically a bunch of dunes under a heavy red filter, with a solitary human scavenger in black coat, hat, and goggles. It's really Morocco, but something keeps flashing "Australia" – why? aha, wait and it'll come. Then we're in a grim, smelly, shantified future metropolis, where he sells the mechanical head and bits he's unearthed to a good-looking, hard-jawed American called Mo, who gives them to his sculptress girl ("Jill", also American) to work on in her impenetrably-high-security lots-of-floors-up... mysteriously-badly-lit apartment. After a night of gratuitous passion, she sticks the found stuff in a composition while Mo goes off (with his Irish friend "Shades", who wears some) to do what drifters do. But oh dear! the parts are from an experimental killer droid that reassembles itself while she's dozing, and starts stalking her round the apartment; and the armoured doors can only be worked from the inside. Can a lone terrorized

female, armed only with everyday kitchen implements and her indomitable feminine cunning, defend herself against a psychopathic killing machine equipped with heat-sensitive vision, chainsaw appendages, cell-dissolving hypodermic attachments, and an extremely naughty drill that it will insist on poking at her privates whenever it gets her cornered?

Well, can you see what's going on here? Look around. Those costumes, that desert, that post-tech survival culture: haven't we seen them in *Mad Maxes*? That third-world future undercity, that interestingly-lit and -furnished noir apartment, that dangling between buildings climax: surely this is *Blade Runner* we are watching! Those sets, those screens, that warehouse look: it's *Max Headroom*, yes? The witty commercials and satirical background throwaways: *RoboCop*, or I'm a flying Dutchman. And hasn't even that PIL title song been heard on screen before, somewhere, someway back, in another time?

That's just it. Forget about the ram-paging robo, which is only there to evoke further great chunks of *Blade Runner*, *RoboCop*, and (above all, and inevitably) *The Terminator*. Poor Jill is being stalked by the *eighties*. No wonder she's so panicked. Can she escape from the barrage of dead icons before she dies of embarrassment? I kid not – all the characters are these outrageous club types, the dialogue has lines like "Things are going to get worse before they get better", and there's even a *Mandelbrot* set. (I'm sure those went out of fashion before they even came in...) Even the political chuckaway gags, which are often pretty funny, have oddly nostalgic targets: "radiation-free reindeer steaks"? when would that have been topical? And "The Zone", honestly... have these people no shame? The whole subject seems, in the grand *eighties* tradition, a quintessentially video one, maybe because tales of stalkers in the home are best appreciated in a medium specifically tailored to living-room, after-dark consumption.

But, big but, *Hardware* is a determinedly big-screen movie, and after the appalling first half-hour it's really

not a bad one. The art direction is amazingly good for the budget, and far better than the subject really expects: lots of fussy, crowded, densely-textured backgrounds of found material, ingeniously lit in *Citizen Kane* shadowvision to make it look as though there's loads more set than they could afford. The effects don't look anything like as strapped or shoddy as they presumably must have been, and the whole thing stinks of love, perfectionism, and the kind of endless unnecessary patience that only obsessed youth can muster. And yes, apart from the bloody filters and the relationship scenes it's generally very well directed, all considered. If R. Stanley has a future, it's surely here rather than in writing, because the script is an uneasy 2000 AD mix of utterly brilliant throwaways ("Fair Isle Electronics," a fridge full of cartons of "Unigator Lactoplasm") and really frightful fore-ground stuff. The world is completely incoherent, the satire splotchy, the characters hopeless, the emotions sculpted from pure foamed plastic, and the original plot concepts nil; only the action writing is graduation standard. But happily that's the part that carries the rest.

Otherwise, the players are unknowns and seem inexperienced, but there's been lots worse; at least the Americans sound like real Americans, and perhaps are. (At least, he does sleep in his underpants; while she's called "Tracy Travis," though of course it could just be a clever professional name.) There's some possible misjudgments for the US market – there's a very casual attitude to recreational drug use, and it may be a problem that the only characters to survive are the two heavy users, one of whom needs to be E'd out of his nod for the plot to work (so cutting won't help). If you really long for an sf thriller that displays not the slightest trace of influence from either Ridley Scott or James Cameron, or if you possess either a Firstdirect account, a Microwriter Agenda, or a CD of "One World, One Voice," then you're probably not ready yet for the *eighties* revival. But for a film made almost entirely by young persons with hairstyles, *Hardware* is so much better than anything you could have expected that it's really hard not to be disarmed.

On our other screen, by contrast, is a massively expensive specimen of the cinema of extreme old age – with US funding, ILM effects, Spielberg leading the credits, and probably the greatest living behind-camera name imprinted possessively on the title. Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams* are, quite simply and without remote rival, the most preposterous cinematic folly erected in our lifetime, and anyone who can argue otherwise must be watching some private composite of their own. Imagine giving anyone, even um I dunno David Lynch, millions and millions of currency units to tell you his dreams. You'd have to be on something pretty heavy. Just sixty seconds of listening to some earnest git narrating from his private cinema-of-the-mind is normally enough to inspire in one a savage impulse to infibulate his brain. Yet those silly cases at Warner's gave Kurosawa two crawling hours, just because he's the greatest filmo on the face of the planet. Can you believe that? When they saw the results, could they?

Well, it would be unfair to deny that two of the eight dreams are really quite close to wonderful. The opening "Sunshine through the Rain" number has that kind of barmy logic and creepy sense of suddenly realizing you're trapped in something inextricably horrible that only dream narratives really have – though I expect a lot of it is just cultural translation and seems quite normal in Kyoto. "A fox was here. He was very angry. He left this for you" (a harakiri sword) "and says you have to kill yourself. You'll have to find him again and persuade him. He might be under that rainbow." But then it stops just as it starts getting weird, and you're left with one of several overlong production numbers recalling nothing so much as a popvid paused forward a frame at a time. In fact, not just the music and dancers but everyone, in every single dream, moves with unbearable, geriatric slowness. Even in the apocalyptic "Mt Fuji in Red" sequence where all the reactors have gone up and hordes of citizens are running screaming, we cut straight to three figures standing motionless on a beach doing a pit of pointing and stuff. And I almost took my own life during the "Blizzard" segment. Don't the old realize we striplings have attentions spans?

But I'm glad I stayed my hand, because the second great moment is one of modern cinema's milestone moments of priceless pottiness. It's long been apparent that Martin Scorsese is, quite irrespective of what he does with film, the greatest star in the universe. Nobody makes camera like a Scorsese interview. The man could charm the underwear off your loins without undoing a button. So, for his



From 'Hardware' (Palace)

front-of-lens almost-debut (there was that Soviet thing that died; half-remember?), what more inspired casting than as the mighty and topical Vincent? We'll dye your beard red, and we can stick a bandage round your box so nobody will know you haven't really cut off your ear; and we'll give you some dialogue to establish what a thoroughly driven person you are, which you'll deliver to a former Japanese popster with all your native professionalism and conviction, without the slightest trace of embarrassment or bafflement as to what you're doing here. Tim Roth will just wither when they see you.

Well, it's no wonder no Japanese director has ever made the cross into Hollywood mainstream. The cultural chasm is just unbridgeable. The kind of mentality that can make the Scorsese cameo, and frame it with a bizarrely straight sequence of a smiling Japanese tourist in blue jeans traversing a montage of famous Van Gogh brushworks, is simply beyond any Western scrutability. To say this is a deeply personal project steeped in lifetime auteurial themes of heroism, apocalypse and shame is to stifle bemusement under a mask of glazed comprehension. I doubt it really has much to do with old age, either, when the epics of Kurosawa's seventies have been so consistently zippy, and he adamantly refuses to play the swan-song card. *Dreams* is just a folly, as grand and as daft as any can be: magnificent and ghastly, unmissable and unbearable in equal, inseparable degrees. And as it's subtitled, you can happily wait for the video and catch it on fast forward. Doesn't it make you glad to be young?

Tube Corn TV Reviews by Wendy Bradley

Who is Raphael? If you answer casually, "Raffaello Sanzio, 1483-1520, Italian High Renaissance painter" this is clear evidence that you are not (1) under the age of 13; (2) the parent of an under-13; or indeed (3) a cool dude. The correct answer is, of course, "the Turtle in red."

Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles is a cult cartoon series which gains an extraordinary 4-5 million audience on BBC 1. A straw poll of friends and relatives' children showed 100% recognition of the title and the characters and a near 100% viewing figure in the target 4-11 year old age group. The series began as a comic strip called *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, humungously popular with a teenage audience in the States, and the Ninjas became Heroes for the sake of BBC producers' peculiar guidelines on not encouraging violence in children. Leonardo (blue), Raphael (red), Michaelangelo (orange) and Donatello (purple) are pizza-eating martial-arts expert giant turtles who wear identifying coloured masks, sound like Lloyd through-the-keyhole Grossman, have a giant rat sensei called Master Splinter and hang out with a girl reporter who persistently has to be rescued from malevolent master criminals.

What is it that makes a programme take off in this way? The children's TV schedules are crammed with 'toons, good and bad, but suddenly there is a mass movement and every child is demanding Turtle sweatshirts, lunch-boxes, stationery and cuddly toys. I suspect that it is necessary to be in the target age group to tell, since the

parents of my audience sample reacted to the Turtles in the same way as I did myself, with mild amusement but no great enjoyment. But my efforts to elicit any reason for the programme's appeal from children produced hysterical giggling at five, a lengthy discourse as to which of the Turtles had the trendier weapon from a bunch of blood-thirsty eleven-year-olds and the comment that cartoons are more exciting because you can get people killed in a dramatic way without it being frightening from a seven-year-old. I suspect the appeal of the Turtles is tied up with the appeal of 'toons in general, with the cathartic effect of the obviously unreal violence recognized by my interviewee as well as the opportunities for anarchy and mayhem in the same structured, unthreatening, framework. The specific appeal of the Turtles as opposed to 'toons in general must also, I suspect, come from the way they are designed. They are intended to be hip; they speak a hip slang, they live on pizza, they are street-wise and stately cool, and it obviously works. They are also virtually unknown or at least incomprehensible to adults and this, too, must be a strong recommendation to the child audience.

In the end, though, it is impossible to identify the elusive ingredient that turns something into a cult, and if it were not then of course every programme would have it. Unfortunately when there is a positive attempt to create a cult which fails the result can be excruciating. Tyne Tees were clearly aiming with **Kappatoo** to hook into the audience that supports the *Dr Who* industry, successful science fiction having a constituency far beyond the age group at which it is ostensibly aimed. They also appear to have been hoping to tap into the Jason Donovan/Kylie Minogue fan reservoir with fresh-faced youthful Brit Simon Nash in the twin roles of Simon Cashmere and his 23rd-century twin Kappa 29643 (Kappatoo for short).

This seven-part live-action series running from May 1990 on ITV has Kappatoo time-travelling into the present day and persuading his double to take his place in the year 2270 in order to take part in a contest on the hypergrid against a fearsome punk-style rival, Sigmasix. The series has some neat ideas about the possible future put across in a humorous manner; Kappatoo has difficulty with all this 20th-century walking, transportation in the future being by a matter-transmitter beam fresh out of *Star Trek* and *Blake's 7* (except that now the beam, instead of shimmering or wiggling, gathers itself into a point around the navel before you disappear). He is played as an innocent abroad; riding a motorized lawnmower in the belief this is a bicy-



cle, filling his shopping trolley with petfood in imitation of the first person he sees in the store, zapping a menacing vacuum cleaner with his handy wristband communicator/weapon.

Unfortunately at the time of writing only two episodes have been transmitted and the later episodes were not yet available for review, so the nature of the hypergrid and the contest which will presumably climax the series is a mystery which rather tended to make the scenes in 2270 irritating. There is also a computer which began as a reassuring Zen-style voice but which, by episode two, had transformed itself into humanoid form and was played by impressionist Andrew O'Connor in a performance of teeth-grating chirpiness.

In the end, though, the programme fails because of its production values; a bodystocking and plastic armour are not the future but a lazy shorthand just as Sigmasix's punk hairstyle and studden shoulders are present-day signals rather than predictions of things to come. My straw poll showed no recognition of the series or characters, and the volunteers I persuaded to sample the first episodes for me thought it was "weird" but "funny" and they were as confused by the hypergrid as I was myself. Although they said they would watch the rest of the series I detected politeness rather than enthusiasm. The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles will be reappearing as a megahype *Batman*-style movie at Christmas but, noble though the attempt may have been, I strongly suspect Kappatoo will gather itself into a point around its navel and never be seen again. Cowabunga!

(With thanks to Ian, Catherine, Elizabeth, Susan, David, Peter, Rosie and friends.)

(Wendy Bradley)

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A Workshop Lexicon

Bruce Sterling

It's said that in the misty days of yore, science-fiction editors used to grow their writers from a handful of magic beans. This quaint practice may persist in rare cases, but the seedbed of talent in modern sf is the regional or national workshop. In America this state of affairs is well-advanced. Astoundingly, one can even obtain actual university credits for participating in "Clarion," an American course for young sf writers set up in 1968, with keen foresight, by Damon Knight, also founder of the SFWA.

In the Clarion workshop, would-be writers are wrenched from home and hearth and pitilessly blitzed for six straight weeks by established sf pros, who serve as creative-writing gurus. But the workshoping experience definitely does not require any shepherding by experts. Like bad rock bands, an sf writers' workshop can be set up with ease in any vacant garage by any group of spotty enthusiasts with nothing better to occupy their time.

The general course of action in the modern sf workshop (known as the "Milford system") is admirably simple. Attendees bring short manuscripts, with enough copies for everyone present. No one can attend or comment who does not bring a story. The contributors read and annotate all the stories. When that's done, everyone forms a circle, a story is picked at random, and the person to the writer's right begins the critique. (Large groups may require deliberate scheduling.)

Following the circle in order, with a minimum of cross-talk or interruptions, each person emits his/her considered opinions of the story's merits and/or demerits. The author is strictly required, by rigid law and custom, to make no outcries, no matter how he or she may squirm. When the circle is done and the last reader has vented his opinion, the silently suffering author is allowed an extended reply, which, it is hoped, will not exceed half an hour or so, and will avoid gratuitously personal ripostes. This harrowing process continues, with possible breaks for food, until all the stories are done, whereupon everyone tries to repair ruptured relationships in an orgy of drink and gossip.

Iwon't comment on the merit of workshoping as a practice, except to say that, like the institution of marriage, it seems to work for a lot of people, while those for whom it doesn't work are often exceptionally bitter.

We now come to the core of this article, the SF Workshop Lexicon. This tasty item was compiled by Mr Lewis Shiner and myself from the work of many writers and critics over many years of genre history, and it contains buzzwords, notions, and critical terms of direct use to sf workshops.

The first version, known as "The Turkey City Lexicon" after the Austin, Texas writers' workshop that was a cradle of cyberpunk, appeared two years ago. In proper ideologically-correct cyberpunk fashion, the Turkey City Lexicon was distributed uncopyrighted and free-of-charge: a decompiled, photocopied chunk of free literary software. Since then, the Lexicon has been printed in fanzines, circulated at American sf workshops, even uploaded onto the GENIE computer network. Most recently it appeared in the Texas semi-prozine *New Pathways*, in a handsome laser-printed edition.

For this appearance in *Interzone*, the European *Première*, the Lexicon has been re-named, expanded and improved. Shaved, sober, and wearing a tuxedo, the Lexicon now bears a copyright mark, which means that if you attempt to photocopy this article for use in your local workshop, your photocopier will swell up and explode. Yes, I have actually seen this happen. Don't try it at home.

Some Lexicon terms are attributed to their originators, when I could find them; others are not, and I apologize for my ignorance. I'm always on the lookout for improvements and amendments in this ongoing project, and I can be reached care of this magazine.

Science fiction boasts many specialized critical terms, including such academic oddities as "prolepsis," "cognitive estrangement" and "euchronia". Gary K. Wolfe's *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy: A Glossary and Guide to Scholarship* (Greenwood Press, 1986) is an excellent source of these. These terms

possess profound intellectual merit, but when it comes to "doctoring a sick story," they are about as useful as the medieval theory of humours. This present lexicon attempts to use rough, rollicking, rule-of-thumb stuff that any ambitious subliterate guttersnipe can swiftly comprehend.

The Lexicon.

PART ONE: WORDS AND SENTENCES

"Said-book" *ism*. An artificial verb used to avoid the word "said." "Said" is one of the few invisible words in the English language and is almost impossible to overuse. It is vastly less distracting than "he retorted," "she inquired," "he ejaculated," and other oddities. The term "said-book" comes from certain pamphlets, containing hundreds of purple-prose synonyms for the word "said," which were sold to aspiring authors from tiny adverts in American pulp magazines of the pre-WWII era.

Tom Swifty. A compulsion to follow the word "said" with an adverb, as in "'We'd better hurry,' Tom said swiftly." This was a standard mannerism of the old Tom Swift adventure dime-novels. Good dialogue can stand on its own without a clutter of adverbial props.

Brenda Starr dialogue. Long sections of talk with no physical background or descriptions of the characters. Such dialogue, detached from the story's setting, tends to echo hollowly, as if suspended in mid-air. Named for the American comic-strip in which dialogue balloons were often seen emerging from the Manhattan skyline.

Burly Detective syndrome. This useful term is taken from sf's cousin-genre, the detective-pulp. The hack writers of the Mike Shayne series showed an odd reluctance to use Shayne's proper name, preferring such euphemisms as "the burly detective" or "the red-headed sleuth." This syndrome arises from a wrong-headed conviction that the same word should not be used twice in close succession. This is only true of particularly strong and visible words, such as "vertiginous." Better to re-use a simple tag or phrase than to contrive cumbersome methods of avoiding it.

Pushbutton words. Words used to

evoke a cheap emotional response without engaging the intellect or the critical faculties. Commonly found in story-titles, they include such bits of bogus lyricism as "star," "dream," "dance," "song," "tears," and "poet," clichés calculated to render the sf audience misty-eyed and tender-hearted. *Brand-name fever*. The over-use of brand-names to create a false sense of gritty verisimilitude. It is useless to stock the future with Hondas, Sonys, and IBMs without accompanying visual and physical detail.

"Call a Rabbit a Smeerp." A cheap technique for false exoticism, in which common elements of the real world are re-named for a fantastic milieu without any real alteration in their basic nature or behaviour. "Smeerps" are especially common in fantasy novels, where people often ride exotic steeds that look and act just like horses. (Attributed to James Blish.)

Roget's Disease. The ludicrous over-use of far-fetched adjectives, piled into a festering, fungal, tenebrous, troglodytic, ichorous, leprous, synonymic heap. (Attr: John W. Campbell)

Gingerbread. Useless ornament in prose, such as fancy sesquipedalian Latinate words where short clear English ones will do. Novice authors sometimes use "gingerbread" in the hope of disguising faults and conveying an air of refinement. Tough-guy journalists of the old school used to refer to this derisively as "fine writing." (Attr: Damon Knight)

Not Simultaneous. A common structural sentence-fault in beginning writers, "not simultaneous" involves the mis-use of the present-participle. "Putting his key in the door, he leapt up the stairs and got his revolver out of the bureau." Alas, our hero couldn't do this even if his arms were forty feet long. This shades into "Ing Disease," the tendency to pepper sentences with words ending in "-ing," a grammatical construction which tends to confuse the proper sequence of events. (Attr: Damon Knight)

PART TWO: PARAGRAPHS AND PROSE STRUCTURE

Bathos. A sudden, alarming change in the level of diction. "The massive hound barked in a stentorian voice and then made wee-wee on the carpet."

Countersinking. A form of expositional redundancy in which the action clearly implied in a conversation is made explicit. "'Let's get out of here!'" he shouted, urging her to leave."

Show Don't Tell. A cardinal principle of effective writing. The reader should be allowed to react naturally to the evidence presented in the story, not instructed in how to react by the author. Specific incidents and carefully observed details will render auctorial lectures unnecessary. For instance, instead of telling the reader

"She had a bad childhood, an unhappy childhood," a specific incident – involving, say, a locked closet and two jars of honey – should be shown.

Rigid adherence to show-don't-tell can become absurd. Minor matters are sometimes best gotten out-of-the-way in swift, straightforward fashion.

Laughtrack. Characters grandstand and tug the reader's sleeve in an effort to force a specific emotional reaction. They laugh wildly at their own jokes, cry loudly at their own pain, and rob the reader of any real chance of attaining genuine emotion.

Squid in the Mouth. Basically, the failure of an author to realize that certain of his/her own weird assumptions or jokes are simply not shared by the world-at-large. Instead of applauding the wit or insight of the author's remarks, the world-at-large will stare in vague shock and alarm at such a writer, as if he/she had a live squid in the mouth.

Since sf writers as a breed are generally quite loony, and in fact make this a stock-in-trade, "squid in the mouth" doubles as a term of grudging praise, describing the essential, irreducible, divinely unpredictable lunacy of the true sf writer. (Attr: James P. Blaylock)

Handwaving. An attempt to distract the reader with dazzling prose or other verbal fireworks, so as to divert attention from a severe logical flaw. (Attr: Stewart Brand)

You Can't Fire Me, I Quit. An attempt to diffuse the reader's incredulity with a pre-emptive strike – as if by anticipating the reader's objections, the author had somehow answered them. "I would never have believed it, if I hadn't seen it myself!" "It was one of those amazing coincidences that can only take place in real life!" "It's a one-in-a-million chance, but it's so crazy it just might work!" Surprisingly common, especially in sf. (Attr: John Kessel)

Fuzz. An element of motivation the author was too lazy to supply. The word "somehow" is a useful tip-off to fuzzy areas of a story. "Somehow she had forgotten to bring her gun."

Dischism. The unwitting intrusion of the author's physical surroundings, or the author's own mental state, into the text of the story. Authors who smoke or drink while writing often drown or choke their characters with an endless supply of booze and cigs. In subtler forms of the Dischism, the characters complain of their confusion and indecision – when this is actually the author's condition at the moment of writing, not theirs within the story. "Dischism" is named after the critic who diagnosed it. (Attr: Thomas M. Disch)

Signal from Fred. A comic form of the Dischism in which the author's subconscious, alarmed by the poor quality of the work, makes unwitting critical comments: "This doesn't make sense."

"This is really boring." "This sounds like a bad movie." (Attr: Damon Knight)

False Interiorization. A cheap labour-saving technique in which the author, too lazy to describe the surroundings, inflicts the viewpoint-character with a blindfold, an attack of space-sickness, the urge to play marathon whist-games in the smoking-room, etc.

False Humanity. An ailment endemic to genre writing, in which soap-opera elements of purported human interest are stuffed into the story willy-nilly, whether or not they advance the plot or contribute to the point of the story. The actions of such characters convey an itchy sense of irrelevance, for the author has invented their problems out of whole cloth, so as to have something to emote about.

Wiring Diagram Fiction. A genre ailment related to "False Humanity," "Wiring-Diagram Fiction" involves "characters" who show no convincing emotional reactions at all, since they are overwhelmed by the author's fascination with gadgetry or didactic lectures.

White Room Syndrome. A clear and common sign of the failure of an author's imagination, most often seen in the beginning of a story, before the setting, background, or characters have gelled. "She awoke in a white room." The 'white room' is obviously the white piece of paper confronting the author, a featureless set for which details have yet to be invented. The character "awakes" in order to begin a fresh train of thought – like the author. This "white room" opening is generally followed by much earnest pondering of circumstances and useless exposition; all of which can be cut, painlessly.

PART THREE: COMMON WORKSHOP STORY-TYPES

The Jar of Tang. (British equivalent: "the bottle of Vimto"). A story contrived so that the author can spring a silly surprise about its setting. For instance, the story takes place in a weird bubbling purplish ocean, surrounded by a mysterious vitrine barrier, marked with red-and-blue stripes; surprise! our heroes are microbes in a bottle of sparkling Vimto. (Attr: Stephen P. Brown)

When done with serious intent rather than as a passing conceit, this type of story can be dignified by the term "Concealed Environment." (Attr: Christopher Priest)

The "Poor Me" Story. Autobiographical piece in which the male viewpoint character complains that he is ugly and can't get laid. (Attr: Kate Wilhelm)

The Grubby Apartment Story. Similar to the "poor me" story, this autobiographical effort features a starving, miserably quasi-bohemian writer, living in a grubby flat. The story commonly

stars the author's friends in thin disguises — friends who may also be the author's workshop companions, to their considerable alarm.

The Shaggy God Story. A piece which mechanically adopts a Biblical or other mythological tale and provides flat science-fictional "explanations" for the theological events. (Attr: Michael Moorcock)

Adam and Eve Story. Nauseatingly common subset of the Shaggy God Story in which a terrible apocalypse, spaceship crash, etc., leaves two survivors, man and woman, who turn out to be Adam and Eve, parents of the human race!!

Deus Ex Machina or "God in the Box." Story featuring a miraculous solution to the story's conflict, which comes out of nowhere and renders the plot-struggles irrelevant. "Look, the Martians all caught cold and died!"

Just-Like Fallacy. Sf story which thinly adapts the trappings of a standard old pulp-adventure setting. The spaceship is "just like" an Atlantic steamship, down to the Scottish engineer in the hold; a colony-planet is "just like" Arizona except for two moons in the sky. The "Space Western," in which the grizzled space-captain swaggers into the spacer-bar and slugs down a Jovian Brandy before a shoot-out with the black-hat aliens, is perhaps the commonest version.

Re-Inventing the Wheel. A novice author goes to enormous lengths to create a science-fictional situation already tiresomely familiar to the experienced reader. Rarely sees publication except when done by highly regarded mainstream writers.

The Cosy Catastrophe. Story in which horrific events are overwhelming the entirety of human civilization, but the action concentrates on a small group of tidy, middle-class, white Anglo-Saxon protagonists. The essence of the cosy catastrophe is that the hero should have a pretty good time (a girl, free suites at the Savoy, automobiles for the taking) while everyone else is dying off. (Attr: Brian Aldiss)

The Kitchen-Sink Story. A story overwhelmed by the inclusion of any and every new idea that occurs to the author in the process of writing it. (Attr: Damon Knight.)

The Whistling Dog. A story related in such an elaborate, arcane, or convoluted manner that it impresses by its sheer narrative ingenuity, but which, as a story, is basically not worth the candle. Like the whistling dog, it's astonishing that the thing can whistle — but it doesn't actually whistle very well. (Attr: Harlan Ellison)

The Rembrandt Comic Book. A story in which incredible craftsmanship has been lavished on an idea which is basically trivial or subliterary, and which simply cannot bear the weight of such deadly-serious artistic portent.

The Steam-Grommet Factory. Didactic sf story which consists entirely of a guided tour of a large and elaborate gimmick. A common technique of sf utopias and dystopias. (Attr: Gardner Dozois)

PART FOUR: PLOTS

Idiot Plot. A plot which works only because all the characters involved are idiots. They behave in a way that suits the author's convenience, rather than through any rational motivation of their own. (Attr: James Blish)

Second-order Idiot Plot. A plot involving an entire created sf society which functions only because every single person in it is necessarily an idiot. (Attr: Damon Knight)

And plot. Picaresque plot in which this happens, and then that happens, and then something else happens, and it all adds up to nothing in particular.

Kudzu plot. Plot which weaves and curls and writhes in weedy organic profusion, smothering everything in its path.

Card Tricks in the Dark. Elaborately contrived plot which arrives at (a) the punchline of a private joke no reader will get or (b) the display of some bit of learned trivia relevant only to the author. This stunt may be intensely ingenious, and very gratifying to the author, but it serves no visible fictional purpose. (Attr: Tim Powers)

Plot Coupons. The basic building-blocks of the quest-type fantasy plot. The hero collects sufficient plot-coupons (magic sword, magic book, magic cat) to send off to the author for the ending. Note that "the author" can be substituted for "the Gods" in such a work: "The Gods decreed that he would pursue this quest." Actually, the Author decreed that he would pursue this quest until sufficient pages were filled to complete a trilogy. (Attr: Dave Langford)

Bogus Alternatives. A list of plot-paths a character could have taken, but didn't. In this nervous mannerism, the author stops the action dead to work out complicated plot problems at the reader's expense. "If I'd gone along with the cops they would have found the gun in my purse. And anyway, I didn't want to spend the night in jail. I suppose I could have just run away instead of stealing their squad-car, but then..." Best dispensed with entirely.

PART FIVE: BACKGROUND

Info Dump. Large chunk of indigestible expository matter intended to explain the background situation. Info-dumps can be covert, as in fake newspaper or "Encyclopedia Galactica" articles, or overt, in which all action stops as the author assumes centre-stage and lectures. Info-dumps are also known as "expository lumps." The use of brief, deft, inoffensive info-dumps is known as "kuttnering," after Henry Kuttner.

When information is worked unobtrusively into the story's basic structure, this is known as "heinleining."

Stapledon. Name assigned to the auctorial voice which takes centre-stage to deliver a massive and magisterial info-dump. Actually a common noun, as in: "I like the way your staple-don describes the process of downloading brains into computer-memory, but when you try to heinlein it later, I can't tell what the hell is happening." **Frontloading.** Piling too much expository matter into the beginning of the story, so that it so dense and dry that is almost impossible to read. (Attr: Connie Willis)

Nowhere Nowhen Story. Putting too little exposition into the story's beginning, so that the story, while physically readable, seems to take place in a vacuum and fails to engage any readerly interest. (Attr: L. Sprague de Camp)

"As You Know, Bob." A pernicious form of info-dump through dialogue, in which characters tell each other things they already know, for the sake of getting the reader up-to-speed. This very common technique is also known as "Rod and Don dialogue" (attr: Damon Knight) or "maid and butler dialogue" (attr: Algis Budrys).

I've Suffered For My Art (and now it's your turn). A form of info-dump in which the author inflicts upon the reader hard-won, but irrelevant, bits of data acquired while researching the story. As Algis Budrys once pointed out, homework exists to make the difficult look easy.

Used Furniture. The use of a clichéd genre background straight out of Central Casting. We can, for instance, use the Star Trek Universe, only we'll file the serial numbers off it and call it the Imperium instead of the Federation.

Eyeball Kicks. Vivid, telling details that create a kaleidoscopic effect of swarming visual imagery against a baroquely elaborate sf background. One ideal of cyberpunk sf was to achieve a "crammed prose" full of "eyeball kicks." (Attr: Rudy Rucker) **Ontological riff.** Passage in an sf story which suggests that our deepest and most basic convictions about the nature of reality, space-time, or consciousness have been violated, technologically transformed, or at least rendered thoroughly dubious. The works of H.P. Lovecraft, Barrington Bayley, and Philip K. Dick abound in "ontological riffs."

PART SIX: CHARACTER AND VIEWPOINT

Viewpoint glitch. The author loses track of point-of-view, switches point-of-view for no good reason, or relates something that the viewpoint character could not possibly know.

Submyth. Classic character-types in sf

Concluded on page 59

THE INVERTEBRATE MAN



When he was five years old Patrick O'Connell knelt on a thumbtack. The point went in just beneath his knee-cap, and he had thrown himself down with such abandon that it was driven in all the way. He howled with pain, writhing on the floor and instantly attracting the anxious attention of his parents. It took them three minutes to figure out that he had a thumbtack stuck in his leg. His father promptly removed it, but Patrick continued to howl.

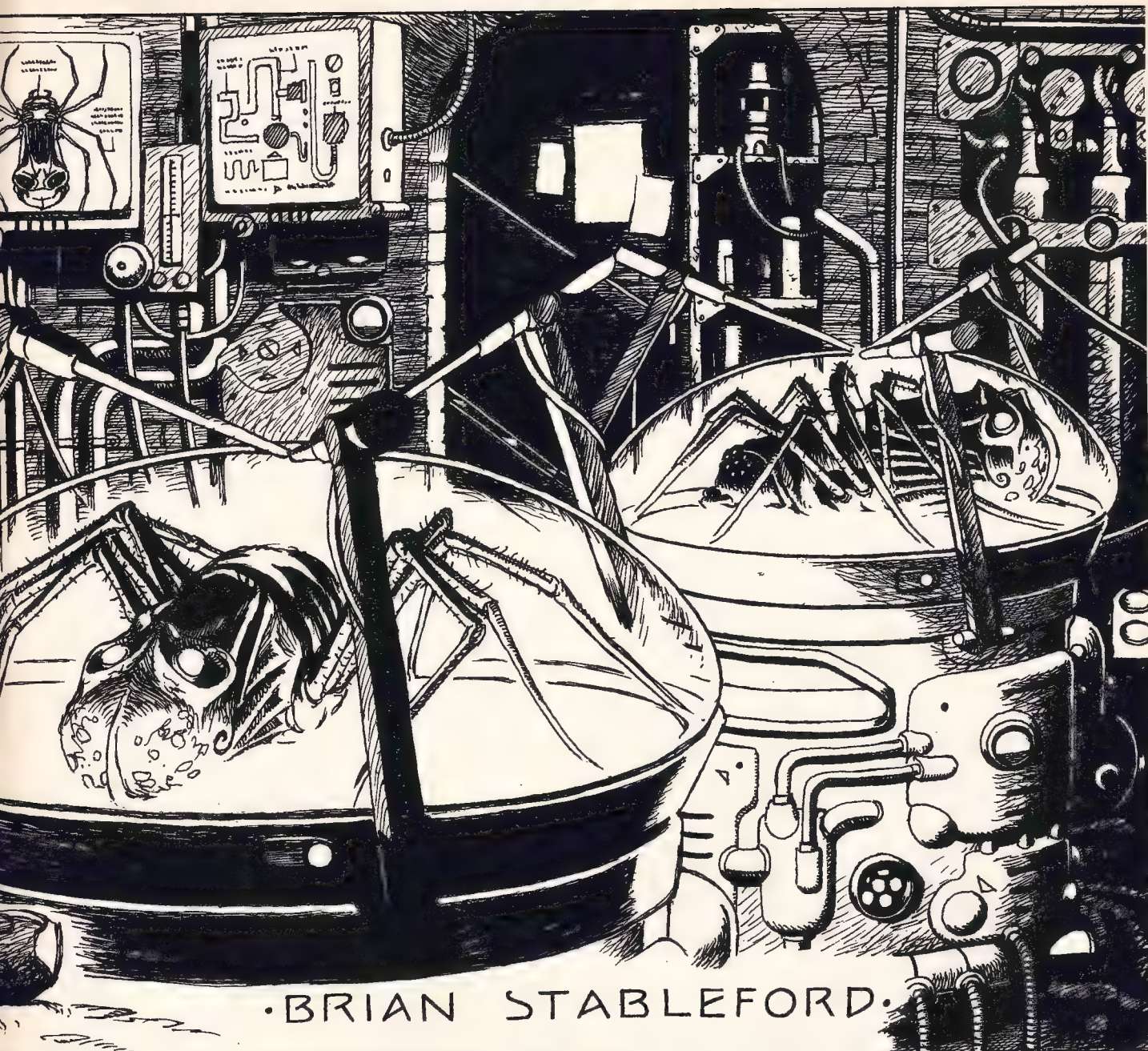
He wept for something like seventeen hours, and in so doing exhausted the patience of his father, his mother and the doctor they called (who pronounced him okay but gave him a "painless" tetanus shot just in case). Patrick saw their sympathy turning to annoyance, and would have stopped crying if he could, but to his dismay he found himself unable to stem the flood of tears. It was not the pain, which had faded, and it was not the shock, which wore off along with the pain. It was something else, as if a trigger had been pressed inside him which made it impossible for him to exert his will and obey his father's urgent command to "pull himself together."

It was not until he had cried himself to sleep that the incident finally closed, but by that time he had heard a terrible statement uttered by his irritated father. "I don't care what you say," said Steve O'Connell to his wife, "that kid has no backbone."

This judgment was unfair, and what was said then in the heat of the moment was never repeated with malice or said directly to Patrick, but for some reason it stuck in the memories of both father and son.

Patrick was no more prone to get hurt than any other boy, and was probably no more scared of the pain. Nevertheless, if he was hurt he tended to over-react. He would cry and cry, unable to stop himself though he thought he might die of shame, and he always interpreted this reaction — as did his father — as physical cowardice. More than once, while lying in bed straining his ears to eavesdrop on his parents' discussion of his "problem," he heard his father say: "There ain't nothin' wrong — he just ain't got the backbone."

At school he was bullied, partly because he was



• BRIAN STABLEFORD •

fairly small for his age, but mostly because he reacted so well (in the eyes of the bullies) to ill-treatment. The sympathy of those in authority, like the sympathy of his parents, was at first given in abundance, but ultimately withdrawn. People pitied him for being hit, but they could not pity him for his pathetic failure to "pull himself together."

Mercifully, childhood passed, and if Patrick's "problem" did not altogether disappear, at least its manifestations became less frequent. He gradually perfected the art of avoidance, steering clear of hazardous situations. He isolated himself from his dangerous peers and courted the good opinion of his teachers by becoming a model pupil. Reading became his main pastime and pleasure, valued much more because it was an escape into safe abstraction than because of the information about the world which it gave him. When he was not reading, he still preferred to be on his own, and he liked to wander off into the woods surrounding his small-town Californian home, where he would watch the everyday routines of nature – especially the behaviour of small things, like

spiders and insects, with which he came to feel a certain identification. They too were commonly disliked and despised, and they too had no backbones.

In his teens, he had regular sessions with the school therapist, who happened to be going through an Adlerian phase at the time and was finding inferiority complexes everywhere. She told him that he was only afraid of fear, and that his academic success was due to a desperate fear of being inferior to others, which drove him to over-achieve and yet remain unsatisfied with his achievement. She told him that his uncontrollable crying when injured was a manifestation of a deep-seated anxiety about failure. If only he could face up to all this and understand it, she opined, he would be able to overcome the difficulty.

Patrick was grateful for this advice, though he did not take it in quite the way it was intended. He came to the conclusion that what he needed was a more fully worked out inferiority complex. He set out to intensify that pattern in his behaviour which the therapist had identified as the chief symptom of his neurosis. He must assert in every possible way his

superiority over others, to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that however much they despised him they had no right so to do. He intensified his studies, and his determination to be a man of learning, but that was not enough. What he *really* needed, he concluded, was to put himself constantly in situations where most people would be afraid, but where he felt quite secure.

He had noted that a great many people harboured some degree of phobia about such spineless creatures as spiders, centipedes and scorpions, while he had none at all. Most people were afraid of things without backbones – and was he not a boy without a backbone himself? He resolved to get his own back on the world, by trading on the fears which others had and he had not. To demonstrate to the world that he was not spineless, he set himself on the road to becoming an Invertebrate Man.

He began to keep insects at home, starting with stick insects and moving on to praying mantises. He relished the alarmed reaction of his parents, and the refusal of his mother to clean his room. The new dimension of privacy was an unexpected bonus. He was specifically forbidden to add more fearsome creatures to his collection, but now that no one checked on the population of his vivaria he soon began to diversify into arachnids; two so-called “wind scorpions” (actually solifugid spiders) became his most prized possessions. By the time he was a year or so into his new hobby he had a dozen glass tanks and was beginning to venture into breeding his specimens so that he could become a supplier as well as a customer of the shops which had initially set him up.

He often carried his more alarming pets around in his pockets, sometimes producing them in public places and stroking them lovingly. He kept scorpions in jars, tempting them to release the poison from their sacs by stinging bits of apple which he lowered into their reach on bits of string, for the benefit of fascinated audiences. They rarely stung him, and even when they did it was never like that awful thumbtack. The first few times it hurt, though he did not keep the more dangerous species, but he built up a tolerance which allowed him to improve his public performances by permitting himself to be stung. He delighted in the horror-stricken reactions of those he entertained, and the way they took it as a testament to his courage. He deliberately built up a tolerance to spider bites as well as scorpion stings, though his early experiments were painful ones.

His tolerance to arachnid toxins allowed him to become confident and comfortable in handling the bigger and more horrid-seeming spiders, but he never took senseless risks, and certainly never tried to get used to the likes of *Lactrodectus mactans*, the black widow. He took great delight in the fact that he handled his pets so well that they treated him almost as one of their own.

He never went in for such practical jokes as leaving his pets in other people's lockers or lunchboxes. This was not because he was worried about people being frightened half to death when they found them, but because he was anxious that no harm should come to his spiders as a result of reckless over-reaction. He

was not so much concerned with frightening others as with demonstrating his own immunity to their fears, confirming his carefully-cultivated moral superiority. After a time, though, he ceased to make ostentatious displays of his familiarity with ugly arachnids. Once his reputation was secured, there was no need to show off any longer.

He enjoyed one moment of triumph when, at the age of seventeen, he was approached by three teenage muggers. The biggest and ugliest of the muggers showed Patrick a cut-throat razor. Patrick showed the mugger a Mexican red-legged tarantula. It was the muggers who ran away, empty-handed.

By the time he went to college, Patrick's “difficulty” seemed to be a thing of the past. He had secured his own release, at the cost of driving himself to unusual academic achievement and estranging himself from his parents, who now regarded him as an alien being with inexplicable drives and desires. At college he studied Zoology, and then did post-graduate research in the application of genetic engineering techniques to the modification of invertebrate species.

The first great success in the industrial application of genetic engineering techniques to invertebrate species had already been scored by John McBride, working with the silkworm *Bombyx mori*. Patrick's work followed on from this, meddling with the genes controlling the production of the spidersilk that various web-spinners produced. His achievements in altering the properties of these spidersilks gave rise to no immediate commercial application, but they did demonstrate potential. After receiving his doctorate, therefore, he joined IBEX – the multinational corporation for which McBride worked – and expressed enthusiasm for working in collaboration with the great man.

“You do realize,” said the personnel officer, “that he's in Baltimore?”

“That doesn't matter,” said Patrick. “I'm quite prepared to travel.”

“Not Baltimore in Maryland,” she explained. “Baltimore, County Cork. The west of Ireland.”

Patrick was already committed. He simply shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh well,” she said. “With a name like yours, you'll probably fit in there just fine.” The way she said it suggested that Baltimore, County Cork, was not her favourite place on Earth. Several months later, in fact, Patrick realized that from the point of view of the corporation's personnel department, Baltimore was the armpit of the organization, to which hardly anyone wanted to go, and from which almost everyone wanted a transfer. Nevertheless, it was there that fate took him, and he set off willingly to meet his destiny.

Patrick began to get some idea of why working in Baltimore would be no picnic when he was in the minicab which took him on the last leg of his long journey, from Cork airport to the shores of Roaringwater.

“Around here,” said the cab driver, “they call it the Frankenstein Factory. Not me, of course – I know better. I know there's no monsters made there...or if there are, they don't hire minicabs.” He laughed at

this, and Patrick marvelled at the fact that it was possible to laugh in an Irish accent as well as speak in one.

Patrick did not reply, but simply looked out the window. There was not much to see; the sky was a solid leaden grey and it was raining. He was to see a great deal of grey sky and rain; by Californian standards the climate in County Cork could only be described as dismal. He further realized why this was not a popular spot when the Director showed him around the various sites. To describe IBEX's Baltimore establishment as unlovely would have been a colossal understatement.

"As you're an Invertebrate Man," said the Director, who was named Nijssen, "you'll be in the warehouses on the south shore. You're not in the Marine Section, of course, but we keep all the inverts together. Most of our work is with prokaryotes, and that's scattered between the holding tanks on the north shore, and the cracking plant and distillation towers inland. There's another installation out on Cape Clear, but that's triple-X security and the likes of you and me aren't even allowed on the island."

Patrick's confusion regarding the references to holding tanks and a cracking plant was short-lived. Although it was now given over completely to biotechnology, the Baltimore station had once been IBEX's toe-hold in the great Celtic Sea oil boom of 1999. Corporations with more considerable oil interests had built their own stations in the east, near Rosslare, or in West Wales on St David's Head, but IBEX had taken advantage of some lavish grant aid offered by the Irish government and the EEC to assist the development of counties Cork and Kerry. When the oil petered out between 2007 and 2011 IBEX had had the choice of paying back that grant money or converting their now-useless oil terminal to some other use. Then an enterprising executive in New York had one day been struck by the uncanny resemblance between a schematic diagram of a proposed continuous-culture system for breeding engineered bacteria and a map of the tanks and towers of the Baltimore terminal.

So the holding tanks and the distillation towers had been adapted into fermenters where transformed micro-organisms could multiply, producing insulin, interferons, enzymes and hormones by means of transplanted genes. And though the Atlantic waters which washed the shores of Cork were rather cool (despite the beneficial effects of the gulf stream) for rearing the crabs, lobsters and oysters which were the focal points of IBEX's marine invertebrate research and development, that work too had been transferred here from the balmy Caribbean. With it had come the burgeoning Terrestrial Invertebrate Section, formerly distributed through a variety of university laboratories until the great John McBride had showed its real potential and had persuaded IBEX's accountants that here was an underfinanced area where some lucky corporation was going to make a killing.

Some members of the local population had not wanted the oil terminal in the first place, had been holier-than-thou about it when the oil gave out, and were even sourer about the adapted facility, which they considered a nonsense. On the other hand, some were in favour of the so-called Frankenstein Factory, because it was the only possible source of employ-

ment for them. This situation was further confused by other attitudes, and on this topic Patrick heard a good deal from the great John McBride, who considered himself a broken wreck of a man, and blamed it all on Baltimore.

"O'Connell?" he said, on being introduced to his new assistant. "I suppose your grandfather came from these parts and you feel as if you're returning to the native soil where your genetic roots are buried?"

Patrick assured him that this was not so. If some ancestor of his had carried the O'Connell name to America during the Great Famine of the 1840s, the family had long since forgotten him. No anecdotes of banshees and potato blight had been handed down over the generations.

"Ach, it doesn't matter," said McBride. "They'll probably take to you anyhow. Are you a Catholic?"

"I'm an atheist," Patrick told him.

"Aye, I've no doubt. But around here there are Catholic atheists and Protestant atheists, and you'd better be the first. Now, I'm the other. My grandfather emigrated to the States in 1927 – and he was a bloody Ulsterman. In the eyes of some of the locals, that makes me kin to the Devil himself. They look at me almost as if I were an Englishman!"

Patrick eventually discovered that this was an exaggeration, and that the inhabitants of Baltimore were no more bigoted than the human average, although the targets of their unreasoning dislikes seemed odd to the foreign eye. The local people reacted with instinctive negative feeling to three breeds of men: they were jokingly contemptuous of the men of neighbouring Kerry; they were not-so-jokingly contemptuous of the English; and they despised the Ulster Scots, for crimes committed over the course of three centuries. It was true that despite McBride's American nationality (aided, perhaps, by the curious shadow of an Irish accent which he somehow retained) they really did consider him an Ulsterman and an invader. By the same token, Patrick (though his accent was pure California) came to be seen as a kind of honorary Irishman.

This difference in Patrick's and McBride's status was nowhere more obvious than in their home.

When IBEX had built the Baltimore station they had raised four small apartment blocks and bought up half a dozen of the largest houses in the neighbourhood to house their employees. Because biotechnology proved to be less labour-intensive than the oil business, at least in respect of highly skilled staff who could not be found locally, much of this accommodation was no longer required for imported Americans, and as part of its unceasing effort to maintain good public relations IBEX let the remainder at peppercorn rents to needy families. Patrick and McBride were senior enough to be given large apartments in a pleasant old house, but of the other three apartments two were occupied by the Flynns and the Flanagan, who crammed them to bursting. Patrick was never quite sure how many children there were in the two families, because they were never still enough to be counted, but there were at least a dozen and a half all told, of ages ranging from a few months to the darkest years of awful adolescence.

The father of the Flynns worked in the old cracking

plant, while the Flanagans' only claim to corporation support was that the eldest daughter was a word-processor operator in the Marine Section. The Flynns and the Flanagans were not bad neighbours, given that they were so many – they could hardly help being more than ordinarily noisy – but Patrick soon found out that McBride was virtually at war with them, and had been for years. The adults treated him with polite scorn, but the children were liable to bait and insult him at almost every opportunity. When Patrick arrived, by contrast, the adults treated him with calculated *bonhomie* and the children with deliberate respect, as if to exaggerate by comparison their distaste for McBride. Sometimes it seemed that McBride could hardly bear to live in his ground-floor rooms when the children were about, and he would often retreat into a secret sanctum which he had established in the cellars, whose door he protected with a padlock and bolts. Patrick soon found out, though, that his own acceptance would not protect him from a stream of jokes about Frankenstein and making monsters; this seemed to be the only vocabulary the Flynns and the Flanagans had for thinking about any aspect of genetic engineering.

Despite these difficulties, Patrick did find some things to like about Baltimore. His other neighbour, who shared the ground floor with McBride and the Flanagans while Patrick shared the first floor with the Flynns, was Dr Annabel Crozier, a small, dark and female Invertebrate Man whose speciality was molluscs. He fell gradually but completely in love with her. The feeling was mutual, and if this were Dr Crozier's story their affection might have played a much greater part in it; in the schema of her life love was something much more significant and satisfying than slugs and snails. But Patrick, for all that his "problem" was far behind him now, had only a small part of his ambition to spare for emotional entanglements. He was still first and foremost an Invertebrate Man, and his relationship with Annabel, though it brought him much joy, took second place in his mind to his much more problematic and much less intimate relationship with John McBride.

McBride was not quite as Patrick had expected. Knowing him only through his published papers, Patrick had recognized him as a man without peer in the field of Invertebrate Biology. He had assumed that McBride would be an aloof and distant figure, calm and abstracted, ruthlessly efficient and inhumanly self-controlled. In fact he was none of these things – at least, not consistently. He was a strange patchwork of a character: paranoid, hyperactive and hard-drinking. He could be jovially manic and angrily melancholic. He was nervously verbose in conversation, but capable when working of astonishing concentration and delicacy of touch. If he was a genius then he was in the Edisonian rather than the Einsteinian mould; a ninety-nine per cent perspiration man. He worked quickly and prolifically, running dozens of experiments side by side on a frenetic trial-and-error basis, never losing track of anything.

The lines of research on which McBride was working for IBEX were varied. His principal research was into the applications of biotechnology to pest control.

He was transplanting pheromone genes into bacteria so that the pheromones could be produced in quantity and used to lure mosquitoes, termites and cockroaches into traps. He was also working on specific pesticides that would kill pests in droves but wouldn't harm other species. In addition, he had been continuing his silk research, which Patrick would be required to take over and broaden. He had also been working with bees, trying to emulate the animal engineers who had developed meat-yielding tissue-cultures by developing tissue-culture structures to produce honey, beeswax and royal jelly on an industrial scale. This too would become Patrick's province, but McBride intended to keep control of his research into the possible medical uses of arachnid toxins as muscle-relaxants. He candidly explained to Patrick that if there was a Nobel Prize for medicine going, he wanted it for himself.

McBride was also conducting some more peripheral experiments of dubious commercial application. One involved the butterfly *Papilio dardanus*, celebrated for having variants whose brightly-patterned wings mimicked several different model species. McBride was trying to figure out how the colour patterning was genetically controlled, with a view to producing new variants whose patterns could be designed to order. "If these boys can mimic half a dozen different models," he told Patrick, "there's no reason why we can't produce pictures on their wings – any image you care to name." His successes in this quest were already quite startling, though he had yet to persuade Nijssen that there was any market for designer butterflies. IBEX were not heavily involved in the arts, certainly not in speculative *avant garde* developments.

With all these things going on, it was not surprising that McBride's labs were in a mess. He had half a dozen research assistants and thirty lab technicians, but he kept them all so busy in their own areas of responsibility that they simply took up their stations in the sea of chaos and left the captain of the ship to look after the whole enterprise. Equipment was continually being appropriated and moved, and it was necessary to hang DO NOT TOUCH notices everywhere to preserve apparatus from being plundered. McBride's car was just as cluttered, not simply with paper but with all kinds of glassware and gadgets.

"I try a few things at home," the great man explained airily. "We don't all have rich love-lives to fill up our leisure time." Such comments were intended as jokes, but there was an underlying bitterness in them. McBride envied him his happiness with Annabel, though not because he admired her himself. Annabel told Patrick that McBride had been deeply in love with one of her predecessors, but that something had gone wrong and she had transferred back to the States. The failed affair had marked the beginning of McBride's drinking problem.

Patrick was much fonder of order and discipline than his mentor. He tried to set things straight at the lab, but soon had to give up. He settled instead for keeping his own work under strict control, and turning a diplomatically blinkered eye to the rest. He was constantly amazed by the quality and the quantity of the work that McBride got through. Alcoholic McBride may have become, but he was a workaholic.

first and foremost. He bequeathed his most celebrated research to Patrick lock, stock and barrel, having lost all interest in it.

"What you need to do," he said, "is breed bigger worms. Then start buggering about with the silks. That stuff with spidersilk was all good practice, but scale is the problem. Maybe it would be best to work up tissue-culture sub-organisms, but in the meantime go for bigger worms. Great fat things that can produce thick thread by the yard."

"I don't know," Patrick told him. "Giantism in inverts produces so many problems. Oxygen supply to the tissues... mechanical support."

"Ach," said McBride, "that's garbage. Too many prissy characters with no imagination tutting at old Hollywood films. Transplant a gene for haemoglobin into the little darlings and turn them into expert oxygen-moppers. Forget the mechanical problems – the worms don't have to fly once they turn into moths. Anyhow, the hydrostatic systems in insect legs are more powerful than they're given credit for. Remember the Golden Age? Those beautiful dragonflies! If inverts have stayed small for the greater part of their evolutionary history, it's because it was economical, not because it was impossible to be big. Don't underestimate your playmates, Patrick. And if in doubt, squirt a bit of helpful DNA into the little sods. Remarkably adaptable, invert eggs. Take care, and you can do anything with the little darlings you want to. Take my word for it."

Patrick took his word for it, and never found his advice poor. And as his respect for McBride was confirmed, so McBride's respect for him increased. Patrick got the impression that McBride had been a lonely man all his life, and could not help but wonder whether there was some strange and shameful secret in his history that somehow paralleled his own, though it was not a matter he could ever discuss. McBride made friends with Patrick, taking the younger man completely under his wing as protégé and confidant. Patrick grew to like him very much, and to pity him desperately for the way the Flynns and the Flanagans used the Frankenstein label to taunt him.

The pity disappeared, though – never to return – when he found out what McBride was doing in his secret sanctum in the cellars of the old house where they lived.

Patrick had been in Baltimore for nearly a year when McBride decided to let him in on the big secret. Even then, it happened only because he was maudlin drunk. Patrick had spent two hours with him in one of Baltimore's several public houses trying to persuade him that it was time to go home. McBride began by complaining, as he often did, about the supposedly disgusting habits of the Flynns and the Flanagans, diversified into more general calumnies against the Irish, and then progressed to complaints against IBEX, the scientific community and the world as a whole.

"I tell ye, Patrick," he said, his speech very slurred, "the world as it is is no place for the likes of us, and the sooner we blow it to hell and gone the better. Nuclear winter's the thing – crucify the entire bloody ecosphere, and let the inverts have it back. They're



the boys that will do it, Patrick – the cockroaches and the spiders, the snails and the worms. It's their world, Patrick, an' always has been. People are just a temporary aberration."

When they got back to the house Patrick had to carry McBride across the threshold, but the older man soon began to revive. He resisted Patrick's attempts to open the door of his apartment, dragging him instead to the padlocked door that led down into the cellars.

"Ye're a good boy, Patrick," he said, "an' I'll show ye somethin' that'll warm ye're old heart. 'Cause ye're an invert man, like meself. An' I know ye'll understand." With Patrick's help, he extricated the key to the padlock, and released it. He ushered the younger man through, and quickly bolted the door behind them, then led the way down the stone steps.

Patrick was surprised to find the cellars very warm. The gas-fired boiler which ran the house's central heating was in a cupboard on the ground floor, but there was obviously another heating system down here. The steps were flanked by whitewashed walls, and it was not until they turned the corner at the bottom that Patrick realized how extensive the cellars were, and how completely McBride had made them his own. He had expected the mess, of course, but not the sheer profusion of apparatus, which must have been appropriated from the warehouses over a period of ten or twelve years. He was not surprised to find vivaria, with living specimens, but the nature of those specimens came as a complete shock. There was a certain irony in this, because many people would have found in those glass cases the perfect fulfilment of their anxious expectations.

John McBride had been making monsters, and had clearly brought to the task at least as much expertise and imagination as he brought to his more orthodox labours. With an eerie thrill of recognition, Patrick realized that most of the creatures in the vivaria were solifugids – the sun spiders and wind-scorpions which had so impressed him in his youth with their grotesqueness. But he had never seen solifugids like these.

It was not simply that they were huge (McBride had clearly spoken from experience in declaring that common theories regarding the impossibility of giant invertebrates were misguided) but that they were decorated so garishly. Patrick looked about him at spiders whose bodies were the size of footballs and whose leg span must be all of four feet, their great bulbous bodies patterned as brightly as the wings of the *Papilio* butterflies in the labs. These patterns were no mere mosaics – they were crude pictures. Each spider-body was formed as a human head, with the hairy crown toward the rear and an open, screaming mouth on top. At the front of the spider's head the eyes and mouth parts were virtually lost in a riot of scarlet, which simulated the region where the fake human head had been torn from its body.

For more than three minutes, Patrick simply stared about him, looking from one glass case to another. In the end, all he could find to say was: "Jesus!"

"I wanted to do it at the labs," said McBride, suddenly sounding more sober. "The bastards wouldn't let me. So I did it here. Twelve years work, Patrick – me magnum opus."

Patrick went through an open door into a further room. McBride leaned through the doorway to switch on the light for him. There were more vivaria, more giant spiders. Black and hairy wolf-spiders, these. Not as large as the solifugids, but the kind of thing that might feature in anyone's nightmares.

"They said it couldn't be done," observed McBride, with evident pride. Patrick could hear in his tone the unmistakable symptoms of an inferiority complex of huge dimension, but whether it was as conscious and calculated as his own he could not tell.

"Why, John?" he asked, faintly. "For Christ's sake, why?"

"All genetic engineers are monster makers," said McBride. "You know that, Patrick. 'Dr Frankenstein, I presume...' You've heard it all. 'Made any good monsters today, Doc?' But you understand, Patrick, what's involved. Works of art, dear boy. Some day, when oil painting is long forgotten, the world's great artists will be working in living clay."

"Does anyone else know what's down here?" asked Patrick.

McBride shook his head, sorrowfully. "I showed someone," he said. "Once. She didn't understand. But I knew you'd understand."

Patrick realized that this was the lost love that Annabel had told him about, and that it was what the woman had seen in this cellar which had spoiled the relationship. Patrick understood that – but what McBride was asking him to understand was something else again.

"It's brilliant, John," he said, unable to prevent himself from adopting the kind of humouring tones he might have used to talk to a madman. "But aren't they dangerous?"

"Of course not," McBride told him. "Maybe not so harmless as they are at normal size, of course, but not difficult to handle. The tanks are closed, and they breathe a special oxygen-rich mixture. When I handle them I give them a whiff of nitrous oxide. They couldn't live long in ordinary air – choke to death inside an hour, in spite of their added haemoglobin." As he spoke, McBride waved his arms at the cylinders of oxygen connected by feed-tubes to the vivaria, and at the pressurized plastic beakers of nitrous oxide which littered the space under the benches. "Of course," he added, "they can't scuttle along like the little ones. I wonder whether that makes them a bit less effective. What alarms people is the way they move, not just the way they look."

McBride went into yet another room, and turned on the light. Patrick followed him, stepping gingerly over the litter of plugboards and electric cables that formed coloured webs on the floor. There were more vivaria here, but most were unoccupied. Two held specimens rather less impressive, in terms of sheer size, than the ones in the other rooms – spiders with bodies no bigger than a man's fist, and legs to match. They were black, with red patches. Paradoxically, they gave Patrick the worst thrill of fear he had yet felt. They were *Latrodectus mactans*: black widows.

"What do you intend to do with them?" he asked.

"I don't intend to do anything," McBride told him. "It's art for art's sake."

"What do they eat?"

"They're not particular. Insect grubs, mostly."

They're easy to grow in giant sizes. Then again, there's always the failures. Waste not, want not. Spiders aren't squeamish about cannibalism."

Patrick continued looking about him, searching for some clue that would make sense of it all. There was so much mess, and these nightmare creations, living in its midst. It was almost surreal. It was as though the laboratories in the old warehouses were the representations of McBride's consciousness, while this secret subterranean realm was the embodiment of his subconscious, populated by the unrepressed forces of creativity which knew no guilt or social responsibility.

"You don't like people very much, do you, John?" said Patrick, quietly. "What is it that you're afraid of, that makes you so desperate to show that you don't share their fears?"

In saying this, Patrick thought he was demonstrating that McBride's confidence in him was not misplaced, and that he really did understand. But it wasn't the understanding that McBride had been looking for.

"Don't be such a prick, dear boy," he said. "It doesn't suit you."

"No," said Patrick, "I don't suppose it does." He left the cellars with the defeated air of one who has discovered that his idol has feet of clay.

A whole week passed before Patrick finally decided to tell Annabel what he had found out, and he did so uneasily, not sure what her reaction might be. She was an Invertebrate Man herself, and had no particular fear of spiders, but she still turned white at the thought of what was lurking beneath her floorboards.

"You have to tell Nijssen," she said.

Patrick shook his head. "They'd sack him. Can you imagine what this might do to the company's image?"

"The hell with the company's image," she replied. "And to hell with McBride, too. Those things have to be destroyed."

Patrick gritted his teeth, and said: "Why?"

"Because they're an obscenity, and because they'd set the genetic engineering business back twenty years if anyone found out."

"An obscenity?" Patrick queried. "Do you know what they're doing out on Cape Clear? Research in biological warfare. Viruses, bacteria, microsporidia, HIVs, and nerve gases. Everything John does at the warehouses is for the betterment of the human condition. He may have a lot to say about the benefits of human extinction, but those boys at the cape are actually trying to do it. Are you telling me that a few big spiders are obscene, and that McBride ought to be ruined?"

"Damn right," she said.

After a pause, Patrick said: "It's good work, Annie. Pure genius."

"So is the work they do on the cape, no doubt," she observed, drily. "Christ, Pat, these things are in our house. Do you seriously want to live with them? If you don't want to shop McBride, then you have to make him destroy them himself."

"He'd never do it. Never in a million years."

"Then someone else has to. You must see that." She paused, and studied him through slightly narrowed

eyes. "You do see that, don't you?" she went on. "You just aren't prepared to do the dirty work yourself. Do you want me to tell Nijssen?"

Patrick squirmed in discomfort. "I don't know what to do," he complained. "He's not just my friend – he's the best Invertebrate Man in the world. Okay, so the world would see him as a mad scientist – but we aren't the world. We're supposed to understand. We're Invertebrate Men. He only told me because he thought I'd understand."

Annabel stared at him, still with a hint of contempt in her gaze. "But you don't understand," she said, pointedly. "Do you?" It was a challenge as much as a question.

"Maybe I do," he said. "It's like the way I used to keep spiders when I was young. A kind of bravado. I didn't keep them in spite of the fact that they were horrid, but because of it. The more horrid, the better. He's just taking that to its logical extreme, that's all. And in it's way...it's pure genius, Annie, pure genius."

"Is this some kind of test?" she asked him, in a softer voice. "Are you trying me out, to see if I'll recoil in disgust? Or are you testing yourself, to see whether an impartial observer thinks that you're as crazy as he is?"

"I don't know," said Patrick, unhappily. "I don't know what to do."

"Well I do," said Annabel. "You tell that bastard that if those things aren't gone by the end of the week, you call in the vermin exterminator. And if you won't, I will."

Patrick looked her mournfully in the eye, and said: "I don't know if I can do that to him."

"Well," she replied. "I guess it's okay for an Invertebrate Man to be short of backbone – but we Mollusc Girls have hard shells. You have five days, Frankenstein."

These words were deliberately calculated to wound, but only at a superficial level. Annabel was, after all, in love with Patrick O'Connell. She had no idea what the reference to a lack of backbone meant to him, and would never have said it had she known how deeply it would cut him. But instead of urging him to action, as she had intended, her cruel remark threw him into a pit of gloom. He left her room to go to his own, and for the next three days he avoided her completely. Whether he would have let the five days elapse, and left her to do her worst without so much as a word, it is impossible to say, because matters came to a head before that, and though what transpired was a disaster for John McBride and the corporate image of IBEX, it probably saved Patrick and Annabel's love-affair from ruin.

On the fateful day, Patrick stayed late to work in the laboratory – more because he was reluctant to go home than because there was urgent work to be done. Because there was no one to give him a lift he had to walk home. The sun had set and it was already beginning to get dark, and to make things worse it looked like rain, but in his masochistic mood he was quite content to get soaked.

He was unaware of any trouble until the police car roared up to him, siren blazing. For a few dreadful moments, as he was hurried unceremoniously into

the back seat, he thought that he was under arrest. The Garda were more intent on getting him to the house than they were on explaining, but when he saw the smoke and the fire engine skewed across the lawn, he realized that the trouble was far worse than that.

Annabel was in front of the house, with a milling throng of Flynns and Flanagans, many of whom were shouting and caterwauling extravagantly. They didn't seem pleased to see Patrick – even Annabel, as she grabbed the door of the police car, was more angry than grateful.

As he stepped out on to the gravel driveway, looking round at the uniformed firemen, Patrick felt like a specimen in a cage. Every eye was upon him, aggressively expectant.

"What happened?" he asked, his anxious eyes looking at the oily smoke oozing from the cracked windows of the ground floor apartments.

"The Flanagan kids," Annabel said. "The boys broke into the basement. What they found there scared them so much they panicked – tripped over the cables, pulled oxygen leads loose. Electrical fire started... burned like crazy with all that oxygen. Pressurized cylinders started exploding. The boys got out; there was smoke everywhere. I started to get the people out – there was panic enough with just the fire. Then the wolf spiders started coming out, and all hell broke loose. Mrs Flynn had hysterics... so did the girls. McBride went down into the bloody basement – stupid! He didn't come out. The Flynn baby's still on the top floor. The fire didn't spread – the brigade filled the cellars full of foam. When they went in, they found one of McBride's Solifugid specials straddling the staircase. I don't know whether that thing's deadly, but I do know there's not a man here is going to go past it. God only knows how many of the things there are upstairs, but somebody has to fetch that baby."

Patrick looked round at the firemen and the Garda. They didn't seem apologetic. They were just resentful.

"You know about those things," said one of the firemen. "Don't you?"

That just about said it all. They weren't necessarily saying that it was his fault. They were just saying that it was his job. He was the Invertebrate Man.

Curiously, Patrick didn't feel scared. Not yet. He looked at Mrs Flynn's tear-stained face, and at one of her daughters, sitting on the grass with her arms about her knees, sobbing wildly. In the distance, he could hear another siren – probably an ambulance.

"I'll need a mask," he said to the fireman who had spoken. "And a flashlight. Have you got a small fire-extinguisher – light enough to carry in one hand?"

The mask was handed to him, and a fireman moved round behind him to strap on the bladder-pack which contained the oxygen/helium mixture.

"The fire's out," said one of the policemen, nodding toward the building.

"Just give me the extinguisher," said Patrick.

Another fireman brought him a metal cylinder, not much bigger than an aerosol can, with a thumb-operated trigger. "That'll give you three or four squirts of foam," he said. "Make sure you get the bugger between the eyes." Patrick took the extinguisher in his right hand, and the flashlight in his left.

As he went through the doorway, it began to rain. At least, he thought, *I'll not get wet*. But his unnatural calmness didn't last. There was no light at all inside the house, and the beam of the flashlight seemed fearfully weak as he moved it back and forth, searching for spiders.

How dangerous they would be he could not guess. McBride had assured him that they couldn't breathe normal air for long, and the atmosphere here was still thick with nasty smoke. But they'd been strong enough and quick enough to get out of the cellar when the shards of exploding gas cylinders smashed their tanks. That couldn't have been easy, with the fire running wild. The wolf spiders and the solifugids weren't poisonous species in their normal forms, but a bite from their overgrown fangs might inject enough venom to kill. And there were the two black widows, which hadn't been mentioned.

As he moved towards the staircase the flashlight picked out the solifugid straddling it, two legs on the banister rail, two on the wall and four on the stair-carpet. In the bright light of the cellar, when first he'd seen such a creature, the imitation of a severed head had seemed poor and impressionistic, but in this light, it was a fragment of nightmare. He could hardly blame the firemen, unwarned and unprepared, for not wanting to take it on. His heart was pounding now, and his body was beginning to shiver, though the night was not particularly cold. He sucked in O/He mixture through the mouthpiece, and paused, fighting for self-control. Then he walked towards the unmoving solifugid, pointed the fire extinguisher at it, and pressed the trigger.

The jet of foam struck the body, and to Patrick's great relief there was no purposive response. The great spider convulsed, pulling in its legs the way a spider does when wet, and tumbled from its perch. Patrick kicked it out of the way and went slowly up the stairs, scanning with the flashlight, searching the walls and the ceiling as well as the floor.

There was a wolf spider on the first-floor landing. It didn't move, but he squirted it anyhow, then crushed it under his heel. He went through the open door of the Flynns' apartment. He could hear the baby inside, not yelling but whimpering, as though too tired to cry at full strength. It was in a back room, whose door was also open. As he came to the doorway and shone the light through it, he saw two more wolf spiders. They had fled as far as possible from the smoke, which was quite thin here – only a grey foggy haze in the beam of the torch. One was crouched under the legs of a chair. The other was between the wheels of the pram, which was rocking very gently as Baby Flynn moved inside.

Patrick wasn't sure that he could get two more squirts out of the miniature extinguisher.

He aimed first at the one beneath the pram, and saw it draw its legs in as the foam hit it. It continued to thrash about, desperately, and Patrick felt a wave of sympathy for it. He moved to the side of the pram, and aimed at the spider beneath the chair. It moved, making him freeze, but it could only move slowly. There was something infinitely pathetic about the drunken way it walked towards him.

He pressed the trigger of the fire extinguisher. A little foam flew out, like a blob of spittle, but then

there was a moist wheeze. The blob missed the approaching spider by a foot.

Patrick leapt forward, and brought his heel down hard on the wolf spider's black body. It crunched beneath his weight, dry and brittle, and red ichor flooded out over his shoe. He felt suddenly sick, but quickly got a grip on himself. He threw the extinguisher away, picked up the baby, and walked steadily back the way he had come. The baby squirmed in his arms, still wailing feebly, and he could not help the thought coming into his head that it was like a great helpless spider.

Outside, he passed the baby to Mrs Flynn, feeling heartily glad to be rid of it. He looked around at the ring of faces, weirdly lit by the stroboscopic blue lights of the various vehicles. There were fewer now – some of the Flynns and the Flanagans had been loaded into the ambulance. He was astonished by the change in their expressions. They were no longer hostile, angry or resentful. Instead, they were positively flooded with relief and admiration.

Patrick realized, to his surprise, that he was a hero.

He looked for the fireman who had found him the extinguisher, and took the breathing apparatus from his mouth in order to speak.

"Got another?" he asked.

The fireman shook his head. Patrick turned back to the door, and was surprised when Annabel darted forward to take his arm.

"McBride's still in there," he reminded her.

"He can't be alive," she said. "You don't have to go."

Patrick shrugged off her restraining hand, as gently as he could.

"Yes I do," he said. And without a backward glance, he went back into the house, heading for the basement door.

The smoke was thick above the cellar steps, and the flashlight was almost useless. The mouth-piece of the mask was tight against his skin, and he could taste nothing but the leaden dryness of the oxygen/helium mixture. He picked his way very carefully down the stairs.

He had no idea whether McBride might be alive. No one could have breathed the smoke-laden air for long, but there were several rooms, and the fire must have affected some worse than others. He knew that there were enough oxygen cylinders to allow McBride to rig up his own supply, if only he had had the time – and provided that the spiders had let him. There had to be half a dozen solifugids down there, and there was no way of guessing how many had died in their tanks. There were also the two black widows, though he was praying that their vivaria had not been smashed in the multiple explosion.

The room where the solifugids had been was in a dreadful state. The fire had started here, amid the greatest density of equipment. The room had frosted-glass windows set high in the wall; there was a pit outside which let light reach them even though they were below ground level. It was through these windows – smashed now – that the firemen had directed their hoses.

He shone the flashlight beam around. One vivarium, miraculously, was still intact. The spider inside was unmoving, apparently dead. Three other



spiders were dead inside their smashed tanks. One dangled grotesquely from the seared ceiling, and though it was clearly no threat it looked horrible, like a human head hanging from a meat-hook, swaying slightly in the smoky air-currents stirred by the heat from the charred electrical cables on the floor.

There was no sign of McBride.

Patrick kept well clear of the dangling horror, and made his way with the utmost care through the room where the wolf spiders had been lodged. The fire had barely spread into this room before being choked by the foam. Four of the vivaria had been broken. He had already killed three wolf spiders, and he had no difficulty picking out the dead body of the fourth—a victim of the fire.

McBride's body was not here. He had to be in the furthest room, with the black widows. Patrick began to pick his way over the littered floor, but he was less careful now, because his attention was already fixed on the smoke-stained door ahead, which stood slightly ajar. A length of cable snaked around his ankle, and as he moved reflexively to free it his other foot—precariously lodged on a litter of broken glass—turned sideways. He fell forwards, but had sufficient command of his balance to make sure that he only fell on to his knees.

There was an upturned thumbtack on the floor. It was driven into his flesh just beneath his right knee-cap.

Shock and pain went through him with such astonishing force that it seemed to Patrick as if he had been hit by lightning. As though released by some secret trigger, tears began to course from his eyes. He was amazed, not so much by the fact that he was crying, but by the sheer volume of his tears and his complete inability to stop the flow.

He did not lose his ability to think clearly. It was as though the tears were a detached phenomenon, no more integral to his state of mind than the rain dripping on to the floor near the frosted windows. Carefully, he pulled out the thumbtack, and got to his feet, wondering whether his legs would still support him.

They would, and they did—but he could only limp towards the door behind which McBride must be.

Supporting himself on the lintel, he pushed the door open, and shone the flashlight inside. There did not seem to be much smoke, but McBride was unconscious on the floor. An oxygen cylinder was beside him, with a length of plastic pipe attached to the nozzle—clearly he had made some attempt to rig up a breathing apparatus, but had not managed to close the door.

Patrick wanted to go to McBride immediately, but forced himself to pause and shine the beam of the flashlight at the two vivaria. Both seemed intact, though he had to blink furiously to see anything at all, and he could not make out anything inside them.

He staggered to McBride's side, and let himself painfully down on his good knee. He groped for McBride's neck, and tried to feel a pulse. It was there, very faintly. Indeed, McBride responded to his touch, turning slightly away. Patrick grabbed the oxygen cylinder, and turned the release-wheel. Hearing a satisfying hiss, he moved the end of the plastic hose close to McBride's face, playing the jet on to his lips.

McBride was still breathing, and the oxygen quickly

revived him. Half a minute passed, and then he stirred, coughing desperately as he rolled on to his side.

"Oh Jaysus," he said, weakly. He looked up at Patrick, taking a moment or two to recognize him. "What the hell are ye weeping for?" he demanded.

"Shut up!" said Patrick, fiercely—the words muffled and distorted by the breathing apparatus. He moved the mouthpiece, and said: "Get up, you bastard. Get up, and get out!"

"Well," said McBride, coughing harshly. "Ye don't..."

At that precise moment a black widow dropped from the ceiling, where she had taken refuge after squeezing out of the hole opened in the side of her tank when the oxygen-lead had been ripped away. She landed on top of Patrick's head, and he felt her unnaturally long legs trying desperately to get a grip on his hairy pate.

Patrick froze. If he could stay absolutely still, he thought, she would not bite him. But the tears were still spilling from her eyes, and he was terrified that at any moment his whole body might be seized by a racking sob.

McBride was frozen too; there was just enough torchlight reflected from the whitewashed walls to show him what had happened.

Very slowly, Patrick passed the flashlight to McBride. The older man took it, and had sufficient presence of mind not to point it directly at the spider.

Patrick could feel a sob welling up inside him, and held his breath with fierce determination. He reached up with both hands, offering a platform to the spider's grappling feet. Had the feet already been entangled, she would have had difficulty, but as it was she moved gratefully on to the levelled fingers. Carefully, he moved his hands forward, and then down in front of his face. Blinking furiously to rid himself of the stinging tears, he kept his eye on the creature as he lowered her gradually to the floor. She moved off his hands and on to a patch of bare concrete, between Patrick's knees and McBride's recumbent body.

She did not seem so very large now. She was much smaller than the wolf spiders, although she was a giant among her own kind.

McBride smashed her dead with one blow of the flashlight. It went out, leaving them in darkness.

For a moment, there was no sound but the drumming of the raindrops. Then McBride said: "Poor little bugger."

Patrick found himself feeling sorry for the spider. She had not attempted to bite him, and it seemed to him that she must have recognized in his touch a kind of sympathy. He felt that in delivering the spider so tenderly to destruction he had betrayed her.

"Let's get the hell out of here," he said to McBride, through his mask. "Do you think you can walk?"

"I can," McBride assured him. "Can you?"

They both could after a fashion. Patrick was limping, but he managed to support McBride as they made their unsteady way through the pitch-dark rooms to the stairway, then up and out into the rain.

Patrick was still crying, and when they came to the doorway he hung back, ashamed to be seen. He need not have worried. Tears mean nothing in themselves, and he had just brought a man from a cellar filled

with acrid smoke. No one thought that his weeping eyes were evidence of anything but courage in awkward circumstances. For the first time in his life, he knew that he had backbone enough, in spite of everything that had gone into the making of him.

As Annabel hurried to his side, and an ambulance-man came to take McBride, Patrick felt suddenly certain that until the day he died he could be proud to be an Invertebrate Man.

Workshop Lexicon

Continued from page 47

which aspire to the condition of archetype but don't quite make it, such as the mad scientist, the bronzed spaceship captain, the superhuman telepath, the crazed supercomputer, the emotionless super-rational alien, the vindictive mutant child, etc. (Attr: Ursula K. Le Guin)

Funny-hat characterization. A character distinguished by a single identifying tag, such as odd headgear, a limp, a lisp, a parrot on his shoulder, etc. **Mrs Brown.** The small, downtrodden, eminently common, everyday little person who nevertheless encapsulates something vital and important about the human condition. "Mrs Brown" is a rare personage in the sf genre, being generally overshadowed by swaggering submyth types made of the finest gold-plated cardboard. In a famous essay, "Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown," Ursula K. Le Guin decried Mrs B's absence from the sf field. (Attr: Virginia Woolf)

PART SEVEN: MISCELLANEOUS

AM/FM. Engineer's term distinguishing the inevitable clunky real-world faultiness of "Actual Machines" from the power-fantasy techno-dreams of "Fucking Magic."

Intellectual sexiness. The intoxicating glamour of a novel scientific idea, as distinguished from any actual intellectual merit that it may someday prove to possess.

Consensus Reality. Useful term for the purported world in which the majority of modern sane people generally agree that they live – as opposed to the worlds of, say, Fortean, semioticians, or quantum physicists.

The Ol' Baloney Factory. "Science Fiction" as a publishing and promotional entity in the world of commerce.

(Bruce Sterling)

Brian Stableford has now contributed eight stories to this magazine – which puts him ahead of Kim Newman, our erstwhile top contributor (as it happens, both authors have six new books due out this year – yes, that's six *apiece*, some of them under pseudonyms). The fact that the above tale is set in Baltimore, Ireland, the same town as Ian Lee used in his recent story "A Lot of Mackerel, a Lot of Satellites" (IZ 37), is just another of those little coincidences.

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Now Read On...

David Garnett

Then I woke up.

I had a headache, my guts were churning, my throat was dry and my mouth tasted like a bad simile. In other words, I had a terrible hangover.

This wasn't particularly unusual, although what was strange was that instead of being at home in bed – or even in someone else's bed – I was lying outside.

Slowly, I sat up. Not only was I out in the open, but I was also somewhere in the country. How had I got here? As I tried to recollect what had happened the previous day, I stared at my new surroundings.

It all looked very familiar – the wood, the village by the narrow river half a mile away, the distant hills – although it took a few seconds for me to recognize where I was. I'd been here before, but only in my mind. This was a landscape I'd invented – and it was no longer mere fiction.

There was no "could it all be a dream?" stuff, because it was too clear and tangible for an alcoholic delusion.

So as well as being conscious (more or less) of my hangover, I was also aware that I was no longer on the Earth I knew. Instead, this was the planet I had created – the World.

It happens all the time in fantasy novels: one moment the hero is living in the here and now, the next he or she is zapped into an alternate reality, dragged through into another dimension via one of those vortexes which are always appearing in the time/space continuum.

Which was exactly what I'd been writing about yesterday.

I checked my watch, but it had stopped. Quartz crystal digital watches didn't work here, it seemed. It felt like early morning, say ten or eleven o'clock.

I leaned back against a convenient tree. What sort of tree it was, I'd no idea. It was simply one of the arboreal props with which I'd imagined the place to be decorated. As I glanced around, I realized how sparse my non-urban backgrounds generally were.

Apart from several more almost identical trees which made up the edge of the forest behind me, there were only a few hills on the horizon, and the small river which twisted through the village. Otherwise the area was very barren, full of empty spaces just waiting to be filled in.

There should have been some isolated farms, a few animals in the fields. There weren't even any birds in the almost cloudless blue sky. At least it wasn't

raining, but only because I seldom gave much thought to the weather.

I'd done better with the village: a small cluster of thatched-roof cottages, smoke spiralling lazily upwards from their chimneys. I often have smoke spiralling lazily upwards, but this was the first time I'd ever seen it happen.

What should I do? There was no point staying where I was and waiting to be transferred back to the real world, because that wasn't in the plot.

The real world? But this had become reality.

I was very uncomfortable, as I had never liked sitting outside on the ground. It wasn't natural, all that dirt and crawling insects. But here I'd woken up on a patch of nice clean grass, and I hadn't seen any insects yet. Maybe there wouldn't be any. There were never any insects in my other books; they weren't needed.

Carefully, with due respect for my head, I stood up.

I suppose that I should at least have felt some degree of mild surprise, but this all seemed quite normal, almost as though I'd been expecting it.

Yesterday's memories were returning now. A fairly typical day. I'd got up in time for the second post, eaten breakfast at noon while doing research by reading the newspaper, then sat at my desk for an hour or two, finding excuses not to start work, before finally switching on the word processor. I'd begun an outline for a fantasy series, but even the synopsis had bored me, and after a while I'd given up and gone over the road to the pub.

As usual, I couldn't remember much after the first few drinks. Getting drunk is a well known method of time travel – drink enough and suddenly it's the next day. But this was the first time I'd heard of it being used as a means of transportation into a fantasy world.

Maybe that was the method I could use for magicking my protagonist away from his own physical and temporal co-ordinates. It was a better idea than having him find a runic talisman. I'd originally suggested to my editor that I should use orgasm as the trigger for transference; but Derek assured me that fantasy readers didn't want anything unfamiliar. He favoured a more traditional approach – hence the talisman.

I'd gone for a drink or several with Derek in London, a week and another era ago, and he suggested that I write some fantasy. I was less than enthusiastic. The word "fantasy" has become degraded and now always brings to mind witches and wizards, goblins and gnomes, all kinds of mythical

beasts and fabled monsters, such as talking dragons and prancing unicorns – and of course the dreaded thesaurus, which stalks menacingly through the pages of every fantasy epic.

As soon as Derek mentioned the advance, I became more enthusiastic. Another point in favour of such a deal was that it wouldn't simply be a one-book contract. At the very least there'd be a trilogy, more often than not a series.

All I had to do was come up with a good enough outline, a couple of sample chapters, and Derek would commission three books from me. Only an idiot writes a novel these days without selling it first, and publishers much prefer to buy books before they are written – it saves them having to read manuscripts.

So we talked about it. Possible titles, number of words per book, what the covers would be like – I favoured the idea of nubile warrior women – whether there should be interior illustrations (that helps because books are becoming more like comics all the time), if the map ought to be in colour or not, whether to include a glossary, appendix and cast list (whose names would contain as few vowels as possible in order to render them unpronounceable). All the important stuff.

Then I went home and came up with the minor details: characters and background and plot.

A final stray link of memory clicked back into place, and I remembered that after closing time I'd returned home and gone straight to my desk. Inspired by alcohol, I'd begun writing the first chapter.

I'd kept on drinking, measuring my output in pages, my input in pints, while the words blinked into green existence upon the screen, growing into sentences, paragraphs. A whole world was thus created. Who needs six days?

As I performed the ancient sacred rite of imbibing fermented barley and hops, while simultaneously allowing my thoughts to flow straight into the technological necromancy of my word processor, I wrote myself here.

I'd always tried to believe what I wrote, but this was carrying things to the ultimate.

I was a bit unsteady on my feet. Maybe when I sobered up completely, I'd be drawn back home. Meanwhile, I was in no hurry. This was all good experience, because it would help me write the books.

What I needed most of all was a drink.

I began walking towards the village, wishing I hadn't imagined it so far away. Because this was one of my books, it was a safe bet there would be a pub down there. A tavern, I mean, or an inn – got to get the pseudo-medieval terminology correct. There was always a bar scene in whatever I wrote, even the kids' books.

As I made my way across the flat and desolate landscape, an unnerving idea began nagging at the edge of my consciousness.

Perhaps I wasn't me.

Maybe I hadn't been whisked here by the brewer's art, and I wasn't who I thought I was. Instead I was merely the product of someone else – the author who was my alter ego, my creator – who still sat at the keyboard writing all this.

Did the characters he/I invented have an indepen-

dent life all of their own? It was something I'd never considered before.

Did my countless protagonists all continue living out their existences in the worlds and situations I'd devised, even when the book or story ended? Or were they doomed to repeat themselves over and over whenever someone started reading about them? Walking a Möbius strip, trapped helplessly on a whirling cosmic roundabout.

A terrible life, no matter what – particularly for those who had come to a nasty end, fated to replay their death agonies over and over again.

I'd given even less thought to my characters than my readers, which was almost mathematically impossible because I seldom considered the people who read my stuff – except for the important ones, the apes. Agents, publishers, editors.

But I was me, I was convinced of it. A living, breathing person, not a fragment of my own imagination. I felt like me, and I was sure I looked like me – but then all my protagonists are based on me. I put myself into all of them, it has to be that way. Even my heroines are aspects of my own identity.

I really needed that drink by now.

The tavern was exactly where I had visualized it, and I pushed open the door. It was dark inside, and for a moment I wondered if it was open. But then I realized that there were no licensing laws here – the place was governed by my rules, after all.

It wasn't much different from my local. In fact, all the bars I ever wrote about were only thinly disguised versions of my favourite haunt. Instead of chairs, there were wooden stools and benches, while the floor was covered with straw. The cigarette and gambling machines were gone, as were the dartboard and pool table. Where they had been, the room was empty. As with the land outside, there was a kind of vague nothingness waiting to be filled, except that here it was more noticeable.

There were several people in the background, shadowy figures who supped their ale from pewter tankards. They were all clad in rustic costumes of the appropriate period – I'd imagined this was somewhere between eleventh and fifteenth century England. (It never pays to be too precise, and no one cares that much.)

None of the locals paid any attention to me, and as I studied them more closely I found out why.

They had no faces.

It was very seldom that I bothered describing anyone – "tall/short" or "fat/thin" or "old/young" were about the limits of my descriptive vocabulary. I'd always preferred to allow the (hypothetical) reader to fill in such details. That was why I hadn't given any features to the inn's occupants. They were just extras, it didn't matter what they looked like...or whether they had faces or not. They only had minor roles, not even speaking parts, but I was pleased to observe that they were at least three-dimensional – not the traditional cardboard cut-outs so favoured by critics.

I went up to the bar, which was just a roughly hewn table holding a barrel of beer. I recognized the girl standing there; she had a face. It was Jenny, the barmaid at my local, and she was dressed in traditional peasant clothing instead of her usual tight blouse and slit skirt.

By now the girl – okay, she was in her mid-twenties, no longer a girl, but the effects of feminism on sexual role reappraisal haven't yet permeated down to the fantasy strata – by now she would have been pouring me a pint of my usual. In this dimension, however, she'd never seen me before.

"A tankard of ale, wench," I told her.

I could order a beer in seven languages, but there was no problem here. Everyone would speak twentieth-century English. I hated all that "thee" and "thou" stuff, although throwing in a few archaic phrases was okay – and I'd have to make sure I didn't let the others use the word "okay."

"Yes, master," she replied, and she even bowed slightly, which I liked.

That was one of the attractions of a fantasy novel. The reader identified with the hero or heroine, who was always someone important, a prince or princess, or at very least an aristocrat. Who wanted to read about the serfs or yokels? The usual pattern was for the protagonist apparently to be a nobody, but in fact he/she was the true heir to the kingdom and would by the end of the book/trilogy/series be reinstated in his/her rightful place on the throne.

And my character was pretty important here: it was his destiny to change the world. He was a god, although he didn't know it at first. If it's status you're after, you might as well go for the big one.

"Is your name Jennifer?" I said, as the girl poured my beer.

She nodded. "Yes, master," she repeated.

I wasn't sure whether Jennifer was a suitably medieval name, but it would have to do. My drink tasted awful, but I couldn't tell whether that was the fault of the ale or my mouth. I swallowed half of it, and felt much better, then I took a seat in the corner. Jen continued watching me, and at first I thought this might be because of what I wore – sweat shirt, a pair of cords and sneakers. But I realized the truth when she disappeared and returned soon after with Terry: I hadn't paid for my drink.

This created a problem.

Terry was the landlord, both at my local and here. Tall and fat, I'd always got on well with him, but he wasn't the kind of guy you could take liberties with.

"Terry," I acknowledged, raising my tankard to him with one hand, while digging into my pockets with another.

Terence sounded even more anachronistic than Jennifer, but I had other things to worry about. I didn't have any coins on me, not that it mattered because they wouldn't have been accepted as legal tender here, but I did find a tenner in my back pocket. I could probably have bought up the whole village with that kind of money, except that paper currency hadn't been invented yet.

I was in trouble. Why hadn't I thought of this? Heroes shouldn't have to worry about money any more than they did about language differences. It was so silly, such a minor thing. So minor that I'd completely overlooked it; it was the kind of detail I'd have to correct when I wrote the book.

Lack of finance ought not to have been much of a problem for a god, or even an author. I tried desperately to think up some kind of plausible excuse for my impecunious condition – that my groom was

stabling my horse and would soon be here with my funds, or that my bodyguard was outside and he was even taller and fatter. But I've never been that good at talking, which I suppose is why I write.

Terry towered above me. "A farthing for the ale," he said.

Farthing didn't sound right; but if Terry said so, that was good enough for me.

"And very fine it is, too," I said, finishing off my drink. "Let me have another." In for a farthing, in for a ha'penny.

"Certainly, master," agreed Terry. "If I can see the colour of your money."

His dialogue was a bit hackneyed, but the message was clear.

"Ah...ahhhhhh!" I explained.

* A few seconds later I was lying outside, covered in mud. The stuff smelled awful, and I hoped it was only mud.

I staggered to my feet, slipping and sliding in the filth. Everyone in the whole village seemed to be watching me, laughing and jeering. There was no point in staying. With as much dignity as I could muster, I strode away. Limped, I mean. I'd twisted my left ankle when I fell, and it ached and throbbed with every step I took. I followed the course of the river, and when I was out of sight I did my best to scrape and wash the dirt and slime off both myself and my clothes.

Now what? This kind of thing wasn't supposed to happen. All right, so I was a character in a book – but I was meant to be the hero, wasn't I?

In the original plot I hadn't started off by going to the tavern, so perhaps my destiny was not pre-ordained. I had my own free will, and I'd decided to have a drink. Or maybe I only thought I had made such a decision. There was no way of telling.

But whatever the case, I shouldn't have been thrown into the mud, and neither should I have twisted my ankle. Fantasy heroes are meant to be invulnerable.

Was this how my creator planned to begin the story? It hadn't been like that in the synopsis, but possibly it would alter when the first book came to be written. If so, no doubt the villagers would pay dearly for the way they had treated me. I'd return with my loyal troops and raze the place to the ground, slaughtering everyone. A harsh punishment, maybe, but that was the kind of thing that happened in such epic sagas. No one gets the better of the protagonist and survives to tell the tale – unless there's a sequel.

Even so, this wasn't a very auspicious opening chapter. I didn't like the way things were going – not that this usually mattered, because I made most of it up as I went along. But it was different if I happened to be subject to the capricious whims of some slipshod author who was close to a deadline. Who knew what fate lay in store for me?

What if I was killed?

Or subjunctively: what if I were killed?

No, surely he wouldn't do that to me. I wouldn't do that to myself.

But what if – I hesitated, hating to think of another and even more potentially lethal possibility – what if I was not in my own novel, but someone else's...?

It had happened before. Friends had sometimes used me as a minor character in their own novels, usually so I could die a particularly gruesome death. I'd done the same to them, taking their names and then letting them be brutally mutilated and murdered. It was all in fun, despite the hard layer of rivalry just beneath the surface.

Surely it couldn't be like that now. This was my world, my creation. No one else had read the outline yet, so I couldn't be the victim of a literary vampire – a plagiarist. No one could have stolen from me. That was my pub I'd just been thrown out of, after all.

After cleaning myself up, I sat down on the bank of the river and waited for my clothes to dry. It wasn't much of a river. In fact it looked more like the drainage ditch near where I'd used to play when I was a kid.

I tried to cheer myself up by thinking of how my predicament might have been worse if I'd been in one of my other books.

What if I'd been in a horror novel, for example? Destined to meet my destruction in some gory fashion or other, and all thanks to myself and not through the warped mind of another hack. Or a romance, condemned to perpetual emotion with a young innocent girl who would remain forever a virgin – what a nightmare, a true horror story. But at least this wasn't a novelization. Trapped for all time in a film tie-in, or even worse a television novelization, with a tiny cast and cheap sets.

Alternatively, I might have been in a porn novel. That would have been much more fun, although very exhausting.

This was the more appealing prospect which I was contemplating when my attention was distracted by a cry of fear and despair, and I stood up in time to see a girl come running along the opposite side of the riverbank.

She noticed me and stopped. All I wore were my Y-fronts, and she wasn't wearing that much more – a short leather skirt, brief silk bodice and a pair of sandals tied with thongs almost to the knee. Her top was translucent, and bras hadn't yet been invented.

I recognized her at once. She was the princess in my book. Very beautiful, of course, because that's one of the job specifications.

Although I hate description, I have to fall in with the accepted convention of listing the physical attributes of the female characters. I've always detested the "long-legged, big-breasted, blonde" kind of label, it's lazy and formula writing. But there was no escaping the fact that such a phrase fitted the girl exactly.

Suddenly it seemed things were going to plan. I was back into my outline. Here was my heroine, the girl who my character would eventually take as his bride, once he had become god-emperor of World. But before that, she had to go through the usual indignities of slavery, rape, more slavery, even more rape. And I wouldn't do so well in my own role either, being hunted, captured, tortured, escaping a few times, according to the normal routine.

Those responsible for all this slavery, rape and torture were the dark forces (frequently capitalized as Dark Forces) who sought to bring chaos and destruction to the world. Their role was very stereotyped, but they always seemed to have a lot more laughs than

the legions of light. The goodies were usually a bunch of wimps, but I had to stick with them because they always won in the long run. That was what the readers expected – good defeating evil, justice victorious and truth triumphant, the way it always was back on Earth.

And, according to the plot, the hell hordes were hard on the heels of the princess this very moment. As I listened, I could hear them galloping closer, screaming out their chilling war cries.

The fugitive was just "the princess" so far; I hadn't thought of a suitable name for her yet. Neither did she look like any of my past girlfriends, which was just as well – Princess Mandy or Tina or Jackie didn't sound right.

She stared at me, seeming to know that I was fated to play an important part in her life. Or maybe because she was very desperate.

"Help me!" the princess implored.

I was meant to try and rescue her, even though I was doomed to fail at first. She would be dragged off in chains. The talisman would be stolen from me, and I'd go through the typical variety of employment – gladiator, assassin, thief, mercenary, that kind of thing – not much different from the casual work freelance writers are sometimes forced into because of a temporary cash-flow crisis.

At that moment a grey mist began to drift towards us. Mists are very useful for hiding background detail and so saving on description, and very evocative for dark forces to ride through when they make their first ghostly appearance.

Five score (that's a hundred) barbarian riders galloped out of the swirling fog. Savage warriors, clad in silver and bronze, faces hidden by animal masks, their steeds hung with the bleached bones and shrunken heads of their victims, they were armed with swords and lances, axes and bows.

I felt quite vulnerable in just my underpants.

I gave the princess a friendly smile, then shrugged to show there wasn't much I could do.

She looked terrified, and I couldn't really blame her.

"Help me," she begged again.

"Well..." There wasn't enough time to explain the rest of the plot. "Things look bad," I told her, "but they'll work out in the end. Really."

The princess would spend a while in a harem before being taken aboard a galley to be sacrificed to the spirits of the ocean, then she'd win a temporary reprieve by the shipwreck and the chapter on the cannibal island. That was the great thing about fantasy books, the author could throw in almost everything, any era or culture, the more the better.

"But...aren't you He Who Was Promised?" the princess asked, having to shout as the marauders came ever closer, screaming out their bloodlust.

I shrugged again.

"You're supposed to save me, aren't you?" she demanded.

"Er...that comes later," I told her.

"But aren't you a god? Didn't you create all this? You can do what you want. So – help me!"

"It's not quite as simple as it seems," I said. "I'd like to help, but..."

She'd kept staring at my crotch, and I understood

why when she finally shouted despairingly: "Where's the talisman?"

I'd wondered about that myself. The princess must have thought I had it hidden. Did it even exist?

"I don't know," I called.

The princess glanced back over her shoulder as the first of the masked horsemen raced towards her.

"Fuck you!" she yelled at me, then turned and sprinted away.

I didn't know fantasy genre characters were allowed to swear. But while I was considering that, a single sweep of an axe detached the princess's head from her shoulders. A fountain of blood spurted from her neck, and her lifeless corpse toppled to the ground. Her head rolled into the river. The water became red, pink, then clear once more.

She isn't real, I told myself. She never existed. She's only a character in a book. I made her up.

I tried not to look too closely, because she seemed far too real.

Something was going wrong with the story. The other characters were taking over. It had happened before, but I'd always felt in control, allowing the narrative to develop its own momentum as it explored different and unexpected directions.

The leading rider reined in his horse, his double-bladed axe dripping what looked very much like blood. I recognized him at once: none other than the most vile and loathsome creature that had ever roamed across this world – the Dark Lord himself. (Whose name I had also yet to think up.) It was he with whom I – or my archetypal hero, I mean – would fight a titanic duel to the death at the end of the series.

His death.

Or that was the plan. But it didn't seem as though he wanted to wait that long before our ultimate confrontation.

His army of pestilence had come to a halt, their mounts arrayed behind him. The spectral figure came slowly forward, his horse wading across the river. Another steed followed, its rider swathed in midnight robes. This was his closest ally, the diabolic sorceress whose spells protected him from all harm.

"Er... hi, there," I said. I spoke as quickly as I could, trying to keep my voice from trembling too much. "I'm the guy who created you, so I suggest you don't do anything you might regret. Without me, you wouldn't exist."

"Why do you people all think you're so indispensable?" asked the heathen chief, pulling the beasthead mask from his face.

He gave me the same enigmatic smile as when he'd last told me that one of my books had been remaindered.

Derek, my editor.

I must have imagined the Dark Lord as resembling Derek – although he looked quite a bit different with the sharpened teeth, all the crimson and purple tattoos on his skin and the ritual scars on his cheeks. It was something of an improvement.

The black witch halted beside him, laughing cruelly as her clawlike fingernails tore away the veil which covered her face.

Karen, my agent.

I'd always believed she was on my side, but a part of me must have known better, and that was why I'd visualized her as the villain's fiendish companion. After all, Karen and Derek met each other far more often than I saw either of them. They lunched together, drank together – and who knew what else they did together?

"Can you ride a horse?" Derek asked me.

I'd never been on a horse in my life, but his question took me by surprise and I didn't respond.

"Can you fight, use a sword, shoot an arrow?"

I shook my head.

"Are you the greatest wizard who ever lived? Are you a mighty warlord who can raise and lead an army of vengeance?"

I shrugged.

"Then you aren't going to cause us much trouble, are you?" said Derek.

He had a point.

Derek laughed out loud, and Karen's echoing screech sent shivers up my spine. (A cliché, I know, but it really happens now and again – and then.)

As one, they spun their horses and raced back across the river. A thunder of hooves, a whirlwind of dust, and they and their foul cohorts vanished into the mist.

The world was theirs to pillage and loot, and there was nothing I could do. This was no longer my outline, my plot, my book.

I'd been heavily edited again.

David Garnett has contributed only three stories to *Interzone*, but he has been with us almost from the beginning – "Saving the Universe" appeared in issue 3 and "The Only One" in issue 22. Born in 1947, he published his first novel in 1969. He is perhaps best known these days as an anthologist, thanks to his *Zenith* and *Orbit SF Yearbook* series. However, his writing career (often pseudonymous) has been wide-ranging, and no doubt the above story was written from bitter experience. No pun intended.

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Earth is the name, earthen is the weight, David Brin is **Earth** (Macdonald, £13.95), we might be in for a tussle. This reviewer (for starters) is moderately ambivalent about one-word titles that sound as though their authors claim ownership of the patch signified. *Grass*, *Dune*, *Moon*, *Earth*, *It*, *Eternity*. Titles of this sort don't address the world; they call out to us that they are themselves the address. But we must not presume. *Earth* may in fact address the issues of the planet, not purloin them. It may be humble with its burden. We may need to thank David Brin for bringing us some news. Let us knock on *Earth* and see if Mother's in.

Alex Lustig, a bright young scientist of the 21st century, has devised a micro black hole power source for a Third World power (Peru), and lost it. He is now afraid that his singularity may have plummeted into orbit around Earth's core, rather like the bombs that end the planet in Greg Bear's *The Forge of God* (1987), or the oopsadaisy black hole that eats up Old Earth in Dan Simmons' *Hyperion* novels (1989-1990), and that there, deep in the hot womb of the Mother, unaccountably stable, it will gobble out the guts of the world. Evidence is mounting that this is the case. A world-class New Zealand Maori tycoon called George Hutton finances Lustig out of his own private enterprise purse to save the world, and they get right down to work. It sounds like almost any old novel out of the American Can-Do Boardgame for Winners at Life. For a few pages.

Like many writers from California, **L**home of Proposition 13 and Noah Cross, Brin does seem to suffer from a strange denial syndrome – a dithery dance of avoidance around the Occam's Razor of plot-logic – whenever a story he's telling requires him to conceive of a government initiative in anything like favourable terms; and indeed the plot of *Earth* does rather tergiversate around the problem of how to save the entire world – through the use of devices, by the way, which cause death and destruction across the face of the planet – without actually deigning to inform anyone actually elected to wield such power that a private enterprise had taken the lives of everyone in its hands (and was spending a few). It is an entirely typical California Ostrich plot, and would seem to bode ill for a book so grandly named. Fortunately, little comes of it. Lustig and his tycoon may set up devices to bully the hole from the deep core (these devices struck a disnumerate reviewer as being cogently argued), and may find a far more deadly second black hole down there which becomes a string, then a maze, then an enigma. Eventually their activities may become slightly more public, and they may

finally be disabused of their fears that a perfidious government had dropped the second hole in error and was not fessing up. But all this pales beside the real plot, which has been turning all along.

Brin's vision of the world 50 years hence, which he conveys with an obsessive didactic urgency throughout the 600 pages of *Earth*, amounts to a complex, deeply researched, cogently-put, comprehensive argument that the human race by 2040 will have nearly consumed its Mother; and that only the most radical solutions will have anything more than a cozening cosmetic effect on the problem. We need not attempt to go into details here: if *Earth* should be read, and it is indeed a book that anyone interested in the survival of our terrifying species should read, then it is enough to say that Brin has presented the case for an emergency response with gripping assiduity, burning care. In the glare of this argument, *Earth*'s initiating plot, and the men who dance to the can-do calliope of its coy turns, seems (for 300 pages) peculiarly silly. Only halfway through the book does one sense that it may be a red herring.

The real story is this. There are three women. A Maiden (who is in love with Lustig and who jives and succours him in the right directions). A Witch (her name is Daisy, she is an ecology freak, she has an almost magical savvy with computers, she is able to penetrate and to manipulate the DataNet which "houses" the information which runs the world; and she feels a profound need to scour Gaia's face almost entirely clean of humanity, so that the ten thousand who survive the harrowing can start again in the bosom of a living Mother). And a Crone (who's an aged gadfly, a saver and and weaver and fount and Nobel Prize biologist, and the saviour who formulates – quoting Julian Jaynes et al – a theory that the human brain-mind is in fact a cohort-ecology just in time to become that theory in an apocalyptic cyberspace final war with the witch). The real story, which the three women dominate, is a fable of the saving of the world. It is a myth. After peeling off the masculine diddle that occupies page-front at the start, after transform-

ing into salve and litany the all-comprehending didacticism of almost every page not sacrificed to the guys, Brin closes *Earth* off in a state of something like reverence. The Mother is in. Because he is a science-fiction writer, he indulges himself (and us) with some fine old Entelechy Opera hijinks (see *Interzone* 38) in the final pages, and an unprepared reader might legitimately question their provenance. But *Earth* is not a prediction for the year 2040; it is a program. It is a protocol for thinking. In this sense, with all its California doddling now forgot, and in the feverish medicament of speculation at its climax, *Earth* is a true science-fiction novel.

Mine! All mine! says Isaac Asimov. Yours! says Robert Silverberg, borrowing an oiled moustache to stroke. And indeed it is the case. **Nightfall** (Gollancz, £13.95), ostensibly a collaboration between Asimov and Silverberg, ostensibly an attempt on Silverberg's part to massage (such expert fingers) Asimov's famous 1941 story into a contemporary novel fit and trim for 1990, is in fact, there can be no doubt about it, read the whole book all the way through and see, a work from the hands of the master himself. Clearly it is Isaac Asimov who felt the need to bring "Nightfall" up from the mists of 1941, Isaac who could not keep himself from looking back, who could not keep from factory-farming himself. *Nightfall* is like a pillar of salt, or osteoporosis. It is a sickbed of a book. It is not alive. It is not dead.

It is not even bad. It is a shame, though.

The Accountant as Hero

Paul J. McAuley

Writer, editor, agent, critic, cultural ambassador: there's little that Fred Pohl hasn't turned his hand to in his forty-plus years in the sf field. Nor, like some of his contemporaries, has he been content in later years to revamp

his old work or try to unify it into some grandiose paper-thin universal history. Instead, he has consistently taken on board the best of the new techniques and fused them with his own cosmopolitan and hugely intelligent social commentaries to create an enviable body of sf: in the last 10 or 15 years he's produced a string of sf novels, *Man Plus*, *Gateway*, *Jem*, *The Years of the City* among others, in which solid social and scientific speculation is given vigour and a human focus through New-Wave concerns with the fallibilities of their heroes. "Growing," as Aldiss and Wingrove noted in *Trillion Year Spree*, "as the field grew, from child to man to grandfather of the field."

All of the above does not mean that I am setting up Pohl to knock him down. Although his latest novel, the punningly titled *Narabedla Ltd* (Gollancz, £13.95), is for him featherweight stuff, it nevertheless has some wickedly sharp edges, and is invested with enough hooks to keep the reader engaged even if it turns out to be rather an overlong journey for the size of the payoff. But we expect nothing less than a polished performance. Pohl is a writer who knows exactly what he is doing, and how best to do it.

Narabedla Ltd is the story of Nolly Stennis, a one-time opera singer who after he lost his singing voice and his virility to mumps turned to accountancy. When one of his musician clients disappears in mysterious circumstances soon after signing an exclusive contract with *Narabedla Ltd*, Stennis investigates and soon finds himself on (or rather in) the second moon of the seventh planet of Aldebaran. For *Narabedla Ltd* is an Earth-based front by which all kinds of artists are recruited for tours of an alien Federation. Stennis is told that he can be given back his voice and his manhood so he can earn his way – this is a strictly freemarket milieu – but there are costs, not the least being that the punishment for rebellion is to have your throat ripped out by an alien monster in slow-time: just such a living statue is placed in the centre of the humans' recreated suburban environment as a horrid object-lesson. And the monster doing the throat-ripping is the doctor who can make Stennis whole again...

Pohl handles this and other moral reversals with a light but deft touch and puts to good use his ability to depict convincingly alien aliens. Yet in the end nothing much is done with the scenario. Stennis gets back his voice, gets a girl, and by virtue of his accountancy skills gets one over on the manipulative aliens by dictating the terms of his contract, all very '80's in its raising the ability to manipulate paperwork figures to heroic status. But this is where satire ends, if it ever really got started, because Pohl lets Stennis

get away with it. In this situation, an accountant really is the competent hero. There are a few agreeable shocks and the jokes aren't forced, and there's a neat though hardly unexpected twist in the tale. And that's it. Satire degenerates into pleasant daydream, and it takes 375 pages to do it. Pohl has done a lot better, but let's not judge this rather soft-centred confection by those high standards. As daydreams go, we could do a lot worse.

For instance, Chris Clairmont's first novel *First Flight* (Pan, £3.99), in which hoary sf tropes are scattered through a threadbare plot with the enthusiasm of a ten-year-old let loose in a toy store. Nicole is a gutsy young pilot who fails to make the grade by mishandling a computer-simulated accident yet gets to fly a cargo ship to Pluto anyway. Pretty soon, she falls in love and her trusty companions are battling with space pirates, and then they are rescued from certain death by capital-A Aliens in a first contact, and then they get to use the alien ship (while the Aliens fade conveniently into the background) against the pirates and expose high-level corruption in the space service... As a novel, it's a disaster: Clairmont clearly loves technophilic hard sf and is best when the lasers are blazing away, but someone should have told him you can only stuff so many unredeemed clichés into a skimpy framework without wrecking it.

But at least *First Flight* is a novel, which *Berserker Base* (Gollancz, £3.99) certainly is not, despite desperate claims to the contrary. It is in fact a collection of short stories by half a dozen writers lashed together with a clumsy, static and irrelevant framework courtesy of Fred Saberhagen, who originated the idea of the Berserkers – huge cybernetic spaceships insensately hostile to organic life – and who would have been better advised to have contributed one or two of his own often nifty stories about them. But like good deeds in a naughty world some of the stories shine from beneath the dead weight of the Marketing Concept.

Best is Connie Willis's "With Friends Like These," a witty piece in which the Berserkers only appear off-stage, as in a low-budget movie where finances stretch to only one wetsuit with tentacle trim. Roger Zelazny, who does not write enough these days, manages in a small but detailed compass to evoke not only the size of the Galaxy but also the depth of its history; Ed Bryant's "Pilots of the Twilight" is wonderfully gothic and also hilariously gung-ho; and Larry Niven's "A Teardrop Falls," although yet another goddamned Larry Niven story whose hero has decanted his mind into a

computer, has the most memorable image, in a compressed description of the destruction of a nascent biosphere. But overall, the book is a triumph of accountancy over commonsense.

Mike McQuay's *Memories* (Headline, £3.99) is a strange hybrid that starts out by fusing the marital breakup of a *Dallas*-style antihero, written in overwrought shopping & fucking style, with a time-travel fantasy, and undergoes a strange and memorable sea-change before the reader's very eyes. David Wolf is a rich, manipulative and utterly unlikeable psychiatrist who finds himself caught up in the time-travel experiments of one of his descendants, Silv. Silv is testing a serum which allows the mind to skip back in time using the brains of its ancestors as vehicles; but one of her subjects, a psychopathic soldier, has taken over Napoleon Bonaparte and refuses to return. Not only that, he threatens to change history.

David Wolf is enlisted to help Silv psychoanalyze the possessed Bonaparte, and all three find themselves caught up and slowly changed by history, as is the book, from corny save-the-world plot to reflective meditation on time and self. Returning to try to change his own life for the better, Wolf is killed and flees his death through time-travel, finding a succession of oddly compliant hosts and love with Silv, by now also a fading ghost; and in the last person whose brain he rides he finally fades to a memory of something richly strange... as is *Memories* itself, once it rises above the overheated clichés of its opening.

For a literature which supposedly deals with the shock of the new, sf has been remarkably resistant to intrusion of, as it were, foreign genes. So all power to The Women's Press for publishing Jane Brierley's limber translation of French writer Elisabeth Vonarburg's *The Silent City* (Women's Press, £4.95). It's a post-catastrophe story which infuses a stock situation – sealed underground cities which are the last refuge from civilization's collapse – with mature speculation about gender roles and social order. Elisa is a product of genetic experimentation with powers of regeneration so considerable that she is virtually immortal and can change sex to order. Growing up as a pawn in power games between the last few dissolute survivors in an automated underground city, Elisa at last rebels and escapes into the real world as a man, finds amidst the barbarism that he is still being manipulated by the man who has been both father and lover, and more or less by accident kills him. Vowing to try and save the world, Elisa returns to the city and raises a new generation of her own kind, who will replenish the population

of men, made rare by a viral plague.

Vonarburg coolly dissects the consequences of Elisa's naivety, and the action but not the focus of the novel begins to draw away from Elisa as her "children" plan their own agenda, and a woman briefly Elisa's lover (when Elisa was a man) plans war against the settlements where the dwindling stock of men have enslaved women, and the story wears thin as Elisa becomes more and more helpless and Elisa can't decide what to do next. To be sure, Elisa's indecision is presented as an alternative to the certainties of so many sf heroes. She listens aghast to the raving of her ex-lover, who has just killed two male envoys who hoped to make peace with her army. "Such old worn-out arguments! Doesn't she realize what she's saying? Doesn't she see that she's a walking cliché, the Amazon, the Woman with the Whip, the Devourer of Men?"

"No, she doesn't. She's ready – and hundreds of women are ready – to die for her cliché. They see it as their truth."

Which is fair enough. But because she has no certainties of her own, Elisa does not act: the alternative is an empty gesture. The battle goes ahead and she wrings her hands as reports limp back to her. Like Tiersias, Elisa sees both sides to every question, but has no answers except to accept the uncertainties of life and seal away the order and ease of the cities. This passivity means that the novel, always centred on her, virtually grinds to a halt as Elisa becomes more and more indecisive and question marks cluster thickly until a kind of resolution is reached.

Still, there is much to admire, particularly in the sections dealing with the city's dreamy confusion of truth and illusion. Vonarburg has a vivid eye for quirks of character and placement of the telling detail, she is alert to the moral traps to which her plot could lead, and there's an admirable lack of hectoring. Interesting to note that the novel was originally published in France in 1981, and that Jane Brierley's translation was published in Canada in 1988, after the writer had moved to Quebec. Historical accident, or is it a measure of our parochialism that English-language sf works seem to get translated into French so much more quickly?

Bloody Religion Wendy Bradley

In *The Blood of Roses* (Century/Legend, £14.99), Tanith Lee has written a book which may well attract the attention of our self-appointed moral guardians by dealing with a

religion which is an alternate-world version of Christianity. She sets up a conflict between those who worship crucified "Christus" through snatches of half-familiar texts, and those who worship in the old way the gods of the forest, the Tree.

In a primeval forest there are small outposts of humanity; brutish villages, tower strongholds, religious enclosures. The heir to a tower is attacked as a child by a moth which drinks his blood and lifts him from his bed, dashing him to the ground, crippled. The crippled heir grows up, is murdered and then rises from the dead for revenge. Lee sets up the world and the tale, weaves them together and then spends another 500 pages unpicking them. People recreate themselves, priests worship but their religion is not the religion they appear to follow, people drink blood and call it wine, drink wine and call it blood.

This is not a vampire book, as its blurb suggests, but a disturbing deconstruction of religion and the religious impulse. The plot occasionally looks about to flower but never does, instead curling back inwards to look at the nature of its petals and ultimately withering away entirely. *The Blood of Roses* is not a book to read if all you are interested in is what happens next: it is unsatisfying, occasionally irritating, occasionally tedious; but it worms its way into your brain and won't leave.

Tim Wynne-Jones' *Voices* (Hodder & Stoughton, £12.95) is also disturbing in its way, but at least here there is a plot, a story that has twists and turns, and a conclusion that fits with what has gone before. It is also one of the most technically accomplished novels I have seen, since it carries off the conceit of having a talking oubliette, a hole in the ground, as a narrating character without becoming risible or Freudian. There is a point at which you feel certain you are going to be cheated by the ending – clearly the heroine is mad and needs help and the talking hole is a mere symptom. Yet since the talking hole is a character, a narrator, the "I" of the story, it is an insistent voice that cannot be medicated into silence. Just because the heroine is disturbed that doesn't mean there isn't a disturbance, and so the novel becomes something of a tour de force.

The other kind of horror, the safely cathartic kind that gives the emotions a roller-coaster ride without lodging threateningly in the subconscious, depends on the key scene where the hero has to explain to his innocent companions – the feisty doctor, faithful priest, luscious lady novelist and plain-man constable – that a third of their town has been taken over by demons who are only vulnerable for

their first three days as humans and this is the third day... J. Michael Straczynski's *Demon Night* (Berkley, \$4.95) handles this scene as confidently as the rest of the plot. Something nasty lurking in the caves escapes to blight a small town with demons but luckily the long lost son of the hereditary guardian turns up in time to do some heroic saving assisted by his swiftly-convinced companions. A good, well-crafted read.

There is definitely a PhD thesis to be had out of the influence of movies on the structure of the novel. I wouldn't mind an option on the film rights of Charles L. Grant's *In a Dark Dream* (New English Library, £3.99). A long, slow build-up of tension sets the scene around the small-town cop and his likeable, realistically drawn family. Then there is the dislocation when things happen or seem to happen, horror coming from the gap between the real and the perceived – and then the watch-out-for-Dark-Dream-2-The-Sequel ending... and you spend the next few hours picking at the loose ends of the plot. So who was the weird priest? Why did aunt Susan turn into a deathhead? Why was there no female baseball team? Second-rate novels always make the best movies!

(Wendy Bradley)

Narratological Mischief Nick Lowe

Not all of Gene Wolfe's long-due *Soldier of Arete* (NEL, £13.95) is as good as its predecessor *Soldier of the Mist*, but its final third more than makes up. By now we know that the amnesiac diarist "Latro" is the former commander of a band of Latin mercenaries in Egypt, who in 480 BC enlisted as marines in Xerxes' invasion fleet against Greece, and fought for the King at Thermopylae and Plataea. There Lucius/Latro took a head wound, enabling him to see and interact with the gods, but robbing him of his past and his daily memory, so that he has to record his experiences in a scroll and reread them each day. Four years on (and two documentaries on Clive Wearing later, which can't help but leave you feeling Latro takes his condition awfully calmly), there's an ironic congruity between Latro's own plight and the mnemonic demands made on the reader by the spectacular legerdemain of Wolfe's best serial plotting. All would be well advised to reread *Soldier of the Mist* with special attention to chapters 34, 37, and 40, and to keep a copy by for consultation (especially the glossary).

Latro's first scroll diared his erratic path through the final pages of Herodotus by way of Thebes, Athens, and Sparta to the great siege of Sestos on the Thracian Hellespont, where a bitter, beautiful finale restored some tantalizing fragments of his identity. Now Latro, with the uncomplicated Kushite Seven Lions and the devoted, increasingly precocious Theban child Io, pursues an escaped Persian into the strange Thracian hinterland, where he makes war and love with Amazons, and uncovers hints that he may be less mortal himself than he suspects. *Arete* is the Greek term for the heroic homology of prowess, human excellence, and divine favour Latro more and more seems mysteriously to embody. His Greek friends connect it (incorrectly, as it happens; Greeks were fanciful in etymological matters) with Ares, the curiously elusive battle god whose instrument, or more, Latro proves himself.

Returning to Greece, Latro becomes embroiled once more in the intrigues of Pausanias of Sparta; but from the poet Simonides, inventor of the art of memory, he finally learns to control some parts of his past, and make plans of his own that climax at the Pythian Games at Delphi in 478 – deliciously narrated in a bizarre prose pastiche of a Pindaric epic. No definite promise of further sequels is offered, but several fine enigmas remain to be fully unravelled, and there are strong closing hints we may yet follow Latro, Pindar, and Io to Sicily and (presumably) Carthage. This boggling piece of narratological mischief isn't yet the best thing Wolfe has done; but if completed, it very well could be.

(Nick Lowe)

Techno-Bunkum Ken Brown

Weapon by Robert Mason (Corgi, £3.99) is called a "techno-thriller" in the blurb. Techno-thrillers seem to be set in the near future and to involve a lot of killing. I always think of them as meant for reading on aeroplanes. Perhaps it's because I don't go on many planes that I don't usually like them. The plots are frequently familiar. *Weapon* is the one about the robot that starts thinking for itself, in this instance a prototype mechanical soldier, on a training exercise somewhere in Central America. It finds itself morally unable to kill, decides to settle in the jungle and become an entomologist, befriends a peasant family, becomes a pantheist and eventually sides with the Sandinistas.

I wish the writing was as much fun as the idea. I'm afraid I found it far from

thrilling and hard to read. That might be my problem rather than the book's – it's a perfectly adequate example of its sub-genre, less morally repulsive than most, and the "techno-" part seems quite up to scratch. I just can't seem to get into the language; it's not quite my dialect of English. It also seems strangely old-fashioned – yet another version of the way the future was.

The same goes for **Beamriders** by Martin Caidin (Pan, £3.99), which could also be described as a techno-thriller but the "science" here (teleportation by encoding people in laser beams) is as much nonsense as the characterization is bland. I got really fed up by the fifth beautiful young scientist, journalist or test pilot who speaks seven languages, is well connected in government and an Olympic athlete to boot.

Wolfgang Jeschke's **MIDAS** (NEL, £2.99) is based around a scientific fiction almost identical to the one in *Beamriders*. A secret project has developed a machine that can encode the molecular structure of anything (animate or inanimate) and reproduce it almost exactly. However it was suppressed by the US government. A decade later, dead scientists start appearing in the desert arms factories of poor but violent countries, and a famous porn star is murdered repeatedly on the streets of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Our hero gets involved in all this when he receives communications from a friend he knows to be dead and starts a quest for the truth, which takes him through some of the more sordid corners of the world in the company of the CIA and various criminals.

This is not a great book, but at least Jeschke thinks about the philosophical and spiritual questions that would be posed by such an invention – not least the obvious ones: "is my copy really me?" and "if I am a copy, who am I?" By contrast, Martin Caidin merely uses his wonderful invention as a toy with which to beat up nasty commies and queers.

Body Mortgage by Richard Engling (Headline, £3.50) calls itself a "science fiction/thriller" on the cover. It's set in Chicago in 1999 and stars a private detective and his beautiful but competent secretary (Blake and Mona) trying to protect a mad inventor who has mortgaged his body (for spare parts) and wants to avoid his creditors until his great invention pays off. The plot, naturally, involves gangsters, corrupt police, poor-but-honest police, ex-hippy businessmen and quite a lot of thugs. The best character in the book is the city of Chicago itself, which the author obviously loves.

But there is something else here. The story is set in the run-up to the great celebrations for New Year's Day, 2000. Blake has strange dreams. He is search-

ing for enlightenment. The dread words "New Age" creep in on the last page. This is, literally, millennial stuff. I rather think that we're going to see a lot more of it before the century is over.

For example, **The Atheling** by Grace Chetwin (Corgi, £3.99), which is actually described as "destined to become a New Age sf classic" in the blurb. I can't see that much new in it. Twenty years after the bomb the rulers of what's left of the US use a mind-reading machine to examine the thought processes of a prophet who predicts another war. What they get is telepathic images from another world, telling the story of a conveniently human warrior king whose arrogant son goes on a pilgrimage and learns about his Inner Self, returning to reform the kingdom. (Where do these writers dream up their wacky plots?) The book ends in failure on both worlds with nuclear war imminent and the Prince surprised in his bed-chamber by his evil brother and assorted assassins. But never fear, there will be a sequel, for this is but the first book of the "Last Legacy tetralogy" – a marvellously inventive science fantasy series that is destined...

Armageddon Crazy (Orbit, £3.50) is by Mick Farren, who was New Age before it was called "New Age." The cover says "2000 AD, the year of America's ultimate special effect" but the book is actually set a few years after that. The backward, oppressed USA is ruled by a preacher President through a whole fascist apparatus of martial law, death squads and the "Deacons," a sort of fundamentalist protestant thought police. Harry Carlisle, one of the last honest New York Cops is on the trail of the "Left Hand Path," a terrorist organization funded by Canadian and British secret services; however he is frustrated by the Deacons' tendency to beat suspects to death before they can be questioned. Meanwhile, yet another preacher is planning a coup, to be kicked off by the projection of a giant hologram of the Last Days (Great Whore of Babylon, the Beast, Four Horsemen and so on) above the Hudson River. It's all rather enjoyable and tightly put together.

And guess what? Stuart Gordon's **The Mask** (Orbit, £3.50), sequel to *Archon* and *The Hidden World*, takes this shambling mound of Catharism, evolution, voodoo and social work to midnight on December the 31st 1999. The Final Shift is due and the Dead are trying to get the living to invite them back to Earth in time to defeat the Beast and save the world. These days they don't need to resort to apparitions and dreams (although there is plenty of that) they just phone everyone up from the invisible satellite you go to when you die. I genuinely enjoy these Stuart Gordon books, but it sometimes takes an effort. There is a vast and needless

multiplication of entities: too many characters (often reincarnations of each other), too many plot parallels between prehistory, the middle ages and the 20th century; too many demiurges, politicians, torturers, sacrificial knives, too many lost loved ones. Anyone who has stuck with the story this far has surely got the point by now.

Let's get back to real science fiction, stuff with space ships and ray guns. Lawrence Watt-Evans' **The Cyborg and the Sorcerers** (Grafton, £3.99) has another robot (well, cyborg) warrior, but this one's minders have cleverly put a bomb in its head to ensure loyalty. The finger on the trigger is a computer programmed to take a tough view of any attempt to surrender or disobey orders. Unfortunately Earth has lost the war, and there is no-one left to change the orders, which are now meaningless. Until the cyborg arrives on a planet where magic seems to work, that is. More fun than I expected.

Robert E. Vardeman's **Masters of Space** (NEL, £4.99) is a typical Vardeman book, which is to say it is a fix-up of three shorter works (*The Stellar Death Plan*, *The Alien Web* and *A Plague in Paradise*) with about one idea each and no conclusive ending. The plot is basically one long space-opera chase thriller, burdened by the absurd idea that it is possible to produce a disease that will kill aliens (all of them that is, of any species) without hurting humans. It's hard to say just how boring I find this book.

Not for Glory by Joel Rosenberg (Grafton, £3.50) has another strangely familiar background. A poor colony world can only exist by putting out its young men as mercenaries to fight in other planets' wars. Their skill and loyalty are legendary, they are the worth of five times their number of ordinary soldiers. A talented officer, in disgrace after an accusation of taking a bribe, is brought out of retirement to handle some particularly difficult jobs. If you've ever read Gordon R. Dickson's "Dorsai" books you'll have no surprises here.

Rosenberg's mercenaries are Jewish (with a smattering of Japanese), fleeing into space from the Second Holocaust (never described in detail but apparently an Arab attack on Israel). Each planet in this future Galaxy is settled by people from one or more Earth nations all living up to their racial stereotypes. The Germans are disciplinarian, Dutch hard-working merchants, the Italians bureaucratic food-loving gigolos and so on. But only fifty years ago the idea that Jews were natural warriors would have been laughed at by anyone who actually believed this racial nonsense. Surely the Germans and Dutch and French (not a lot of Africans or Asians in this future) in space will develop the skills

and way of life needed to survive wherever they find themselves, changing their stereotypes, just as the Israelis have done in Palestine?

Michael Weaver's **My Father Immortal** (NEL, £2.99) intercuts a group of children flying around space in solo life-support pods with the history of their parents back on Earth, showing us why they left after two millennia of trying to sleep out the effects of a nuclear war. The book bursts with ideas, many silly, none ever really followed up. Will people really be listening to Spinal Tap two thousand years from now?

The Third Eagle by R. A. MacAvoy (Bantam, £3.99) has another stunningly original plot idea. A young man leaves home in search of something he can't quite define, meets all sorts of aliens, tribes, and odd sexual habits whilst wandering around the universe having adventures, then returns home older but wiser, having found the one thing that will save his planet, almost by accident. To be fair, this is a readable book, it does have some thought in it, and I enjoyed it. Perhaps a train journey rather than a plane journey.

A little fantasy to finish off with. It's hard to actively dislike Piers Anthony's "Xanth" series – they are now a fact of life, verbal wallpaper, the Radio 2 of the fantasy scene. As the series has progressed the puns have waxed and the mild-mannered sex (never very explicit) has waned, but the basic plot hasn't changed. An inoffensive wally wanders about ineffectually for most of the story, but gets hitched up with a lovely, resourceful and competent young woman at the end. No prizes for guessing which one the typical Piers Anthony reader identifies with. **Man from Mundania** (NEL, £7.95) is a book for reading on the lavatory.

Almost finally, the best of this batch is definitely Patricia Geary's **Strange Toys** (Corgi, £2.99). It's the story of a girl's travels from a California childhood in the sixties, via tragedy and voodoo to the health-obsessed eighties. It's heavily flawed, most seriously at the end, where there is no real conclusion to the matter, and much the best part is the first section written in the voice of an incomprehending nine-year old. But don't let that stop you reading it. We are perhaps at the bottom of Division One here. Michael Weaver and R. A. MacAvoy are more like the top of Division Three – better than their immediate competition, but not in the same league.

It's not quite sf (even though it has a spaceship full of pipe-cleaner people) but I've received a copy of **Derek the Dust Particle** by Perry Natal and Frank Key (Indelible Inc., [BCM, Box 1698, London WC1 3XX], £2). Do my sensitive ears detect a pseudonym? This is a 32-page pocket-size picture book about a day in the life of its invisibly

tiny eponymous hero. Absurdly pretentious waffle, and not cheap at about a penny a word. I loved it. Everyone I showed it to (it's been passed around at more than one party) either hated it, asked "who is it for?" or both. The publishers promise a sequel, *Bring Me the Head of Derek the Dust-Particle!* Sounds imperative to me.

(Ken Brown)

TERRIFYING TEACHERS

Class of 1999 (Vestron Video) is a film set in a future where the youths of America are all brainless drug-taking thugs, going around in gangs armed with guns. Some of them still attend school though, which is rather surprising. At school, they have a new batch of teachers to replace the old worn-out ones. The kids treat these new teachers with as much respect as they treated the old, but this doesn't last very long because these guys are very different.

At the beginning of the film you hear the new games teacher say "One million megabytes," and he peels his face up, revealing his true cybernetic self. These teachers hold discipline very well, as you can imagine; but they soon malfunction and start reverting to their original military use. Instead of being forgiving and not punishing too harshly, they see disobedience as a bad threat and decide to terminate any threatening pupil's existence. The hero realizes what is happening and tries to inform people; but, as he is classed as one of the brainless thugs, nobody believes him. Meanwhile, the new teachers metamorphize into homicidal, weapon-bristling robots on the rampage, whose only desire is to kill everybody who has annoyed them.

Class of 1999 resembles the James Cameron/Arnold Schwarzenegger film *The Terminator* rather closely, in that the robots look totally human at first. The ending is almost a carbon copy, with the robots' skin coming off, showing metallic spindly bodies. It's not an original story; although nowadays it's difficult to come up with something which really is, as so many ideas have been used up. All in all, **Class of 1999** is an average low-budget sci-fi/horror movie which is worth watching if you've got time to waste. Recommended for teachers who can't get class discipline and want to learn how, as well as for disruptive pupils – they'd better watch out!

(James Pringle)

UK Books Received

May 1990

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Aldiss, Brian W. **A Romance of the Equator: Best Fantasy Stories**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04778-X, 345pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy collection, first published in 1989; reviewed by Ian Covell in *Interzone* 35.) 24th May.

Asimov, Isaac. **The Bicentennial Man and Other Stories**. "VGSF Classics 43." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04712-7, 211pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1976.) 24th May.

Asprin, Robert. **Myth Conceptions**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-962760-4, 217pp, paperback, £2.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1980; sequel to *Another Fine Myth*.) June?

Baudino, Gael. **Dragonsword**. "Volume one of an amazing new fantasy trilogy." Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-969070-5, 452pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 17th May.

Benford, Gregory. **Tides of Light**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04759-3, 362pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; sequel to *Great Sky River*.) 24th May.

Boyer, Elizabeth H. **The Curse of Slagfid**. "The sixth of The World of the Alfur novels." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13568-2, 398pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 15th June.

Brunner, John. **The Crucible of Time**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-934850-0, 474pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1983; third Arrow [Legend] issue.) June?

Brunner, John. **Stand on Zanzibar**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-919110-5, 576pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1968; this is at least the fourth Arrow [Legend] issue.) June?

Butler, Octavia. **Imago: Xenogenesis III**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04776-3, 264pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 34.) 24th May.

Card, Orson Scott. **Ender's Game**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-949610-0, 357pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; fourth Arrow [Legend] issue.) 17th May.

Card, Orson Scott. **Songmaster**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-963850-9, 377pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1980; this reprint follows the text of the 1987 American edition, apparently revised.) 17th May.

Card, Orson Scott. **Speaker for the Dead**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-950320-4, 415pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986; sequel to *Ender's Game*; fifth Arrow [Legend] issue.) 17th May.

Charlesworth, Kate, and John Gribbin. **The Cartoon History of Time**. Macdonald/Cardinal, ISBN 0-7474-0680-4, 64pp, trade paperback, £4.99. (Humorous scientific textbook, with pictures by Charlesworth and text by Gribbin; first edition; recom-

mended by Terry Pratchett in a recent *New Scientist*.) Late entry: March publication, received in May.

Cherryh, C. J. **Sunfall**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0356-5, 158pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf collection of linked stories; first published in the USA, 1981.) 7th June.

Cherryh, C. J. **Rusalka**. Methuen, ISBN 0-413-62910-4, 374pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 31st May.

Clegg, Douglas. **Goat Dance**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-52255-5, 422pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989; a debut novel by a new American writer.) 7th June.

Cole, Adrian. **Warlord of Heaven: Star Requiem 3**. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440612-6, 356pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition.) 24th May.

Collins, Nancy A. **Sunglasses After Dark**. Futura, ISBN 0-7088-4479-0, 253pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989; a debut book by a new American writer, it's about a female vampire.) 24th May.

Coville, Bruce. **Philip José Farmer's The Dungeon, Book 2: The Dark Abyss**. Illustrated by Robert Gould. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40202-1, 311pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; the previous volume in this shared-world series was written by Richard Lupoff; Philip José Farmer provides a foreword to each book.) 25th May.

Delany, Samuel R. **The Motion of Light in Water: East Village Sex and Science Fiction Writing, 1960-1965, with The Column at the Market's Edge**. Grafton/Paladin, ISBN 0-586-08910-1, 581pp, paperback, £6.99. (Autobiographical musings by a leading American sf writer; first published in the USA as *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village, 1957-1965* [note the slight changes in the sub-title], 1988; it received a 1989 Hugo Award as "best non-fiction book"; the 40-page appendix entitled "The Column at the Market's Edge" appears to be new to this edition.) 31st May.

Dick, Philip K. **Beyond Lies the Wub: The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume 1**. Introduction by Roger Zelazny. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20764-3, 510pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1987.) 17th May.

Dick, Philip K. **Dr Bloodmoney, or How We Got Along After the Bomb**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-914960-5, 290pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1965; third Arrow [Legend] issue of one of Dick's finest books.) 17th May.

Dick, Philip K. **Martian Time-Slip**. "VGSF Classics 42." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04710-0, 220pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1964; another of Dick's finest; the Brian Aldiss introduction which graced earlier British editions [from NEL] has been dropped.) 24th May.

Dick, Philip K. **Solar Lottery**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-905700-X, 188pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1955; fourth Arrow [Legend] issue; it follows the text of the original Ace Books paperback edition, not that of the Rich & Cowan UK hardcover which was published as *World of Chance* [1956]; according to Gregg Rickman in a recent *PKDS Newsletter*, an "ideal" text would be a combination of the two, which apparently were edited quite separately from Dick's now-lost manuscript.) 17th May.

Duane, Diane. **Spock's World**. "Star Trek." Pan, ISBN 0-330-31247-2, 310pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf shared-universe novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 15th June.

Gay, Anne. **Mindsail**. Macdonald/Orbit, ISBN 0-356-18806-X, 303pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer, the blurb describes it as being "in the tradition of Ursula K. Le Guin.") 10th May.

Geary, Patricia. **Strange Toys**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13580-1, 248pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; winner of the 1988 Philip K. Dick Award as best paperback original.) 25th May.

Greenberg, Martin H., ed. **The Further Adventures of the Joker**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40246-3, 462pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy anthology; a sequel volume to last year's *The Further Adventures of Batman*; contributors include George Alec Effinger, Joe R. Lansdale, Mike Resnick, Robert Sheckley, F. Paul Wilson and others, including Edward Bryant and Dan Simmons writing in collaboration; first published in the USA, 1990; this is actually the American edition with with a UK price sticker on the back.) 25th May.

Greenland, Colin. **Take Back Plenty**. "A Space Extravaganza." Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440265-1, 359pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first edition; Brian Aldiss is quoted on the cover, saying "Greenland proves himself the Verdi of space opera. Awesome orchestration, admirable arias!") June.

Hambly, Barbara. **Beauty and the Beast**. "As seen on TV." Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440741-6, 242pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novelization, "based on the series created by Ron Koslow"; first published in the USA, 1989.) 24th May.

Henderson, Lesley, ed. **Twentieth-Century Romance and Historical Writers**. 2nd edition. Preface by Kay Mussell. St James Press, ISBN 0-912289-97-X, 856pp, hardcover, £55. (Reference book, devoted to historical novelists, writers of love stories, etc; the detail is copious, and a surprising number of the authors covered [e.g. Marion Zimmer Bradley, Angela Carter] are also producers of sf and fantasy; the first edition was published in 1982; the editor's birth-date is given as 1963, so it's unlikely that she edited the original edition [when she would have been just 19 years old]; a valuable resource, highly recommended.) Late entry: published in February, but received by us in May.

Irvine, Abigail, et al. **Arrival**. "Buck Rogers Books." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-013315-1, 316pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1989; it contains original stories about the comic-strip spaceman by Irvine, Murdock, Sheckley and others; a TSR production - see entry for M. S. Murdock's novel *Rebellion* 2456, below, for further comments.) 31st May.

Jackson, Stuart. **Tracer**. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0603-0, 301pp, paperback, £3.50. (Near-future thriller about AIDS and its unpleasant social consequences; first edition; this is probably a debut novel, by a British author who works as "Director of Organisation and Development for Basil-don and Thurrock Health Authority.") 21st June.

Jones, Jenny. **Fly by Night: Volume One of Flight Over Fire**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0238-9, 340pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; this is a debut book by a new British writer; Richard Evans, who discovered the author while he was editor at

Headline, has been talking this one up; and now the publishers have gained the agreement of Michael Moorcock, who describes it as "an extraordinary book, a vivid original.") 9th August.

Justice, Keith L. **Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Reference: An Annotated Bibliography of Works about Literature and Film.** St James Press, ISBN 1-55862-052-4, 226pp, hardcover, £18. (Reference book; consists of a copiously annotated list of book-length works about sf, etc.; first published in the USA, 1989; the original McFarland edition of this volume was available in the UK as an import through Bailey Bros & Swinfen during last year, but then it was priced at £26.) Late entry; published in April, but received by us in May.

Kerr, Katharine. **Dawnspell: The Bristling Wood.** "Volume III of the epic Deverry series." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20741-4, 461pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA as *The Bristling Wood*, 1989.) 17th May.

Lee, Tanith. **Forests of the Night.** Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440613-4, 299pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy and sf collection, first published in 1989; "restores one's faith in fiction as the expression of imagination and original thought," according to Judy Cooke in the *Guardian*.) 24th May.

Lee, Tanith. **Lycanthia [or The Children of the Wolves].** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-966350-3, 220pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1981; this appears to be the first UK edition; the subtitle is shown on the cover, but not on the title page.) 17th May.

McAuley, Paul J. **Four Hundred Billion Stars.** Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0543-3, 253pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 28; the author is of course British, and this was his first novel.) 17th May.

Mann, Phillip. **Pioneers.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20762-7, 352pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1988; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 27.) 31st May.

Meades, Rob, and David B. Wake, eds. **Drabble II: Double Century.** BECCON Publications [75 Rosslyn Ave., Harold Wood, Essex RM3 0RG], ISBN 1-870824-15-6, 122pp, hardcover, £5. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; consists of 100 one-hundred-word storylets by authors ranging from Joan Aiken to Roger Zelazny, with many others along the way including Bayley, Carroll, Cherryh, Clarke, Clute, Coney, Gaiman, Gentle, Haldeman, Langford, Sladek, Stableford [and family], Sterling, Watson and White; as with the earlier volume, *The Drabble Project* [1988], all proceeds go to charity.) Late entry: April publication, received in May.

Misha. **Red Spider, White Web.** Illustrated by Don Coyote, foreword by Brian Aldiss, postscript by James P. Blaylock. Morrigan Publications [26 St Paul's Drive, Scotforth, Lancaster LA1 4SR], ISBN 1-870338-85-5, 216pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous signed limited edition [not seen]; it's a debut book by a new American writer, formerly known as Misha Chocholak, who has made a reputation for herself in small-press publications such as *New Pathways* [where she used to be fiction editor].) May?

Morwood, Peter. **The Demon Lord.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-948930-9, 304pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1984; second in the series which began with *The Horse Lord*; fifth Arrow [Legend] issue.) 17th May.

Morwood, Peter. **The Dragon Lord.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-948660-1, 318pp,

paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1986; third in the series which began with *The Horse Lord*; second Arrow [Legend] issue.) 17th May.

Morwood, Peter. **The Horse Lord.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-948920-1, 254pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1983; second Arrow [Legend] issue.) 17th May.

Morwood, Peter. **The Warlord's Domain.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-95810-9, 283pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1989; fourth in the series which began with *The Horse Lord*.) 17th May.

Murdock, M. S. **Rebellion 2456: Book One, The Martian Wars Trilogy.** "Buck Rogers Books." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-013314-3, 281pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; a TSR production, it seems to have no direct link with the 1970s television series or for that matter the 1950s TV series, which were based on the Universal movie serial of 1939, which in turn was based on the early 1930s comic strip drawn by Dick Calkins, which in turn was based on the original 1928-29 magazine stories by Philip Francis Nowlan - none of them are credited here.) 31st May.

Murphy, Pat. **The City, Not Long After.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-31570-6, 320pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; proof copy received.) August.

Newman, Kim. **The Night Mayor.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-52466-3, 186pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in 1989; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 32.) 7th June.

Parish, James Robert, and Michael R. Pitts. **The Great Science Fiction Pictures II.** Scarecrow Press [imported via Bailey Bros & Swinfen, Warner House, Folkestone, Kent CT19 6PH], ISBN 0-8108-2247-4, 489pp, hardcover, £47.05. (Critical study of sf movies, first edition; the emphasis is on films which have appeared since the preceding volume in the series [1977], although many rather obscure old films are also covered; as the stiff price indicates, it's not the usual coffee-table book: sans dust jacket, small-format, illustrated in black-and-white and printed on fine alkaline paper; a sturdy little reference work, pleasant to handle and crammed with information.) 27th August.

Paxson, Diana L. **Silverhair the Wanderer.** "Book Two of the Chronicles of Westria." Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-52091-9, 310pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 7th June.

Pratchett, Terry. **Pyramids (The Book of Going Forth).** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13461-9, 285pp, paperback, £3.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1989; the 7th "Discworld" book.) 1st June.

Pringle, David. **The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction: An A-Z of SF Books.** Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13215-9, XIX+407pp, hardcover, £16.95. (Reference guide to more than 3,000 sf titles; first edition; written by the editor of this magazine, with the assistance of Ken Brown [who, unfortunately, is not credited on the title page or cover]; there will be a simultaneous trade paperback edition priced at £9.95; proof copy received.) 8th November.

Quick, W. T. **Dreams of Gods and Men.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8330-3, 302pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; sequel to *Dreams of Flesh and Sand*.) 17th May.

Quinn, Daniel. **Dreamer.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-965630-2, 345pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 17th May.

Simmons, Dan. **Hyperion.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0243-5, 346pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; this is actually part one of a two-part novel, the second half being *The Fall of Hyperion* [1990]; both books were reviewed from the American editions by John Clute in *Interzone* 38.) 19th July.

Smith, Guy N. **The Unseen.** Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0345-7, 268pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first edition.) 17th May.

Smith, James V., Jr. **Beaststalker.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20779-1, 398pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988; sequel to *Beastmaker*.) 31st May.

Stableford, Brian. **The Centre Cannot Hold.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-51107-3, 304pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the conclusion of the "Asgard" trilogy, of which the first two parts were *Journey to the Centre* [1982; revised 1989] and *Invaders from the Centre* [1990].) 7th June.

Stableford, Brian. **The Empire of Fear.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-30874-2, 520pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Alternative-history sf novel, first published in 1988; reviewed by Stan Nicholls in *Interzone* 27.) 15th June.

Sterling, Bruce. **Crystal Express.** Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3661-7, 317pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1989; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 33.) 14th June.

Swanwick, Michael. **In the Drift.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-961530-4, 214pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; Swanwick's first novel.) 17th May.

Watson, Ian. **The Fire Worm.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20763-5, 240pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf/horror novel, first published in 1988; part of this work first appeared in *Interzone* as "Jingling's Geordie's Hole," 1986.) 17th May.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **Dragon Wing: The Death Gate Cycle, Volume One.** Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-02072-3, 434pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; it's hyperbolized as "the triumphant hardcover debut of fantasy's most important creative team.") 15th June.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **The Paladin of the Night: Rose of the Prophet, Volume Two.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40045-2, 375pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 15th June.

Wells, Angus. **The Third Book of the Kingdoms: The Way Beneath.** Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0263-9, 345pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 17th May.

Wilson, Robert Charles. **Gypsies.** MacDonald/Orbit, ISBN 0-356-19080-3, 311pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 10th May.

Wrede, Patricia C. **Shadow Magic.** "A Lyra novel." Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8331-1, 279pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1982.) 17th May.

Wynne-Jones, Diana. **Castle in the Air.** Methuen, ISBN 0-416-15782-3, 208pp, hardcover, £8.95. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *Howl's Moving Castle*.) 7th May.

Overseas Books Received May 1990

As yet, comparatively few American and other overseas publishers send us their sf, fantasy and horror titles, but the numbers are growing. If you are an author or editor and would like to see your titles listed here, do try to persuade your publisher's publicity department to send us review copies. (English-language books only, please.) As with the UK listing, an entry here does not preclude a fuller review in this issue or a future issue of the magazine.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Demons by Daylight**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-610-4, 192pp, paperback, \$3.95. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1973; this reprint contains a new foreword by the author.) 10th June.

Jones, Stephen, and Kim Newman, eds. **Horror: 100 Best Books**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-610-4, 256pp, trade paperback, \$8.95. (Critical collection, first published in the UK, 1988; consists of 100 short essays by various hands on "horror" titles ranging from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* [c. 1592] to Ramsey Campbell's *Dark Feasts* [1987]; the book has been a modest success in America, and the hardcover edition is now sought-after.) 25th June.

Koontz, Dean R. **The Servants of Twilight**. Berkley, ISBN 0-425-12125-9, 418pp, paperback, \$5.50. (Horror novel, first published as *Twilight* by "Leigh Nichols," 1984; the blurb informs us: "More than 55 million copies of Dean R. Koontz thrillers in print!") 1st May.

Kube-McDowell, Michael P. **The Quiet Pools**. Berkley/Ace, ISBN 0-441-69911-1, 371pp, hardcover, \$17.95. (Sf novel, first edition.) 1st May.

Ligotti, Thomas. **Songs of a Dead Dreamer**. [2nd edition.] Introduction by Ramsey Campbell. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-580-9, 275pp, hardcover, \$17.95. (Horror collection, first published in the UK, 1989; the true first edition, with widely differing contents, was published obscurely in the USA in 1986, in a limited edition of just 300 copies.) 18th June.

Neidhardt, Robert. **The Final Deception**. Berkley/Jove, ISBN 0-515-10324-1, 313pp, paperback, \$4.50. (Near-future Cold War thriller, first edition; laser technology is "America's last hope" against the nuclear threat from those pesky Soviets and Cubans: isn't this sort of scenario supposed to be outmoded now?) 1st May.

Paine, Michael. **The Colors of Hell**. Berkley/Charter, ISBN 1-55773-349-X, 281pp, paperback, \$3.95. (Horror novel, first edition; "Michael Paine" is a pseudonym for John Curlovich.) 1st May.

Watson, Andy, and Mark V. Ziesing, eds. **Journal Wired: A Quarterly**. Spring 1990. Watson/Ziesing [PO Box 76, Shingletown, CA 96088, USA], ISBN 0-929480-24-4, 175pp, trade paperback, \$10/£6. (Second issue of a book-shaped periodical which carries an ISBN rather than an ISSN; contains fiction and non-fiction by Colin Greenland, Lucius Shepard, Lewis Shiner, Lisa Tuttle, etc; recommended.) May?

Magazines Received May 1990

The following is a list of all English-language sf- and fantasy-related journals, magazines and fanzines received by Interzone during

the month specified above. It includes overseas publications as well as UK periodicals. (Some foreign titles reach us late if they have been posted seamount.)

Fear no. 18, June 1990. ISSN 0954-8017. 84pp. Ed. John Gilbert, c/o Newsfield, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1JW. Monthly professional horror-movie-cum-fiction magazine (six stories this time). A4 size, with full-colour cover and many internal colour illustrations. Contributors: Stephen Laws, Douglas Clegg, etc., plus interviews with the late Virginia Andrews, William Peter Blatty and others. £16 per annum, UK; £23, Europe; £36, airmail outside Europe.

The Hardcore no. 3, date uncertain. No ISSN shown. ??pp. Ed. (?) Scott Dorward, 1st Floor Flat, 212 Croydon Rd., Beckenham, Kent BR3 4DE. Irregular (?) fanzine, "dedicated to the far reaches of sf and to hard edged contemporary story telling" (according to an accompanying letter). A4 size, black-and-white throughout. Contributors: ?? £1.20 per issue. (Note: all details are virtually indecipherable; it's described as a "preproduction copy" and is one of the worst-looking things we've ever seen.)

New Pathways no. 16, July 1990. ISSN 0886-2451. 68pp. Ed. Michael G. Adkisson, c/o MGA Services, PO Box 863994, Plano, TX 75086-3994, USA. Bimonthly semi-professional fiction magazine of increasingly glossy quality. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and mainly black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Brian Aldiss, Richard Grant, Lewis Shiner, Don Webb, etc. \$27 for six issues, USA & Canada; \$36, overseas. (Note: there has been a longish gap since the previous issue, but the magazine has now moved from quarterly to bimonthly, has more pages and is looking better than ever.)

New York Review of Science Fiction no. 21, May 1990. No ISSN shown. 24pp. Eds. Kathryn Cramer, David G. Hartwell et al, c/o Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570, USA. Monthly critical journal of high standards. US quarto size, sans illustrations. Contributors: Frederik Pohl, Dave Langford, Paul Williams, etc. \$24 per annum, USA; \$36, overseas (payable to "Dragon Press").

On Spec: The Canadian Magazine of Speculative Writing vol. 2, no. 1, Spring 1990. No ISSN shown. 92pp. Ed. Marianne O. Nielsen, PO Box 4727, Edmonton, Alberta T6E 5G6, Canada. Twice-yearly semi-professional fiction magazine. Approx 8" by 5½" with colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: J. Brian Clarke, Diane Mapes, John Park, etc. \$9 Canadian per annum; overseas subscribers add \$3.50 (in Canadian funds).

Philip K. Dick Society Newsletter no. 24, May 1990. No ISSN shown. 20pp. Ed. Paul Williams, PKDS, Box 611, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA. Irregular newsletter dedicated to the life and works of the late Philip K. Dick. US quarto size, black-and-white throughout. Contributors: Tim Powers, Paul Williams, etc. \$6 for three issues, USA and elsewhere; £3.50, UK (make the latter payable to "Philip K. Dick Society" and send to agent Keith Bowden, 47 Park Ave., Barking, Essex IG11 8QU).

Probe no. 79, March 1990. No ISSN shown. 84pp. Ed. Neil van Niekerk, c/o SFSA, PO Box 2538, Primrose 1416, South Africa. Quarterly fiction-and-non-fiction fanzine of the club "Science Fiction South Africa." A5 size, black-and-white throughout. Contributors: various. R25 per annum.

The Scanner no. 9, [May] 1990. No ISSN shown. 24pp. Ed. Christopher James, 4 Dover Rd., Cowes, Isle of Wight PO32 6RG. Quarterly fiction fanzine. A4 size, black-

and-white throughout. Contributors: Matthew Dickens, D. F. Lewis, etc. £5.50 for four issues, UK. (Note: the preceding issue, no. 8, also arrived with this one: they're not precisely dated. The Scanner is a member of the New SF Alliance distribution group - write to the address of BBR for further details.)

Science Fiction Chronicle no. 128, May 1990. ISSN 0195-5365. 44pp. Ed. Andrew I. Porter, PO Box 2730, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0056, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Don D'Amassa, Steve Jones & Jo Fletcher, Ed Naha, etc. \$27 per annum, USA; £21, UK (the latter payable to "Algol Press," c/o Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Rd., Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7QQ).

Science Fiction Chronicle no. 129, June 1990. ISSN 0195-5365. 44pp. Ed. Andrew I. Porter, PO Box 2730, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0056, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size. Contributors: the usual. \$27 per annum, USA; £25, UK (the latter payable to "Algol Press," c/o Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Rd., Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7QQ; note the increase in the UK rate).

Science Fiction Guide no. 16, May 1990. No ISSN shown. 20pp. Ed. Charles Platt, 594 Broadway (Room 1208), New York, NY 10012, USA. Irregular fanzine of comment and chat. Half US quarto size, black-and-white throughout. Contributors: Bruce Sterling, Andrew Weiner, etc. \$3 for two issues; \$5, overseas.

Speakeasy: The Organ of the Comics World no. 110, June 1990. No ISSN shown. 76pp. Ed. Nigel Curson, c/o John Brown Publishing Ltd., The Boathouse, Crabtree Lane, Fulham, London SW6 8NJ. Monthly news magazine for comics enthusiasts. A4 size with colour cover and black-and-white internal illustrations. Contributors: various. £12 per annum, UK; £25, overseas airmail.

Starburst no. 142, June 1990. ISSN 0955-114X. 48pp. Ed. Stephen Payne, Visual Imagination Ltd, PO Box 371, London SW14 8JL. Monthly magazine devoted to sf and fantasy in the visual media. A4 size, with full-colour cover and some colour interior illustrations. Contributors: John Brosnan, David Howe, etc (plus an interview with David Gemmell). £20 per annum, UK; \$38, USA. (Although it doesn't publish fiction, it still has the cheek to call itself "Britain's premier science fiction magazine.")

TV Zone: The Monthly Magazine of Cult Television no. 7, June 1990. ISSN 0957-3844. 32pp. Ed. Jan Vincent-Rudzki, c/o Visual Imagination Ltd, PO Box 371, London SW14 8JL. Monthly devoted to sf and fantasy on television. A4 size, with full-colour cover and some colour interior illustrations. Contributors: various. £15 per annum, UK; \$28, USA. (This is a fairly new companion magazine to *Starburst*, and it's the first we've seen; not to be confused with the recently-deceased *Fantasy Zone*.)

Visions: The Intercollegiate Magazine of Speculative Fiction and Fantasy vol. 4, no. 2, no precise date shown. ISSN 0899-4919. 76pp. Eds. Wolfgang H. Baur et al, 409 College Ave., Ithaca, NY 14850, USA. Irregular (twice-yearly?) semi-professional fiction magazine which claims a large circulation for its Soviet edition. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Matt Ruff, Jeff VanderMeer and many student authors (plus an interview with Piers Anthony). \$10 for three issues, USA.



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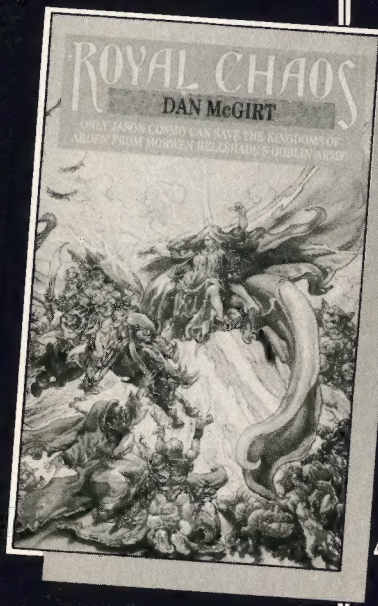
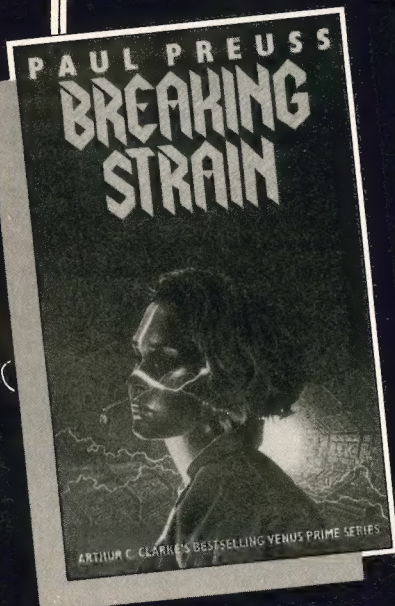
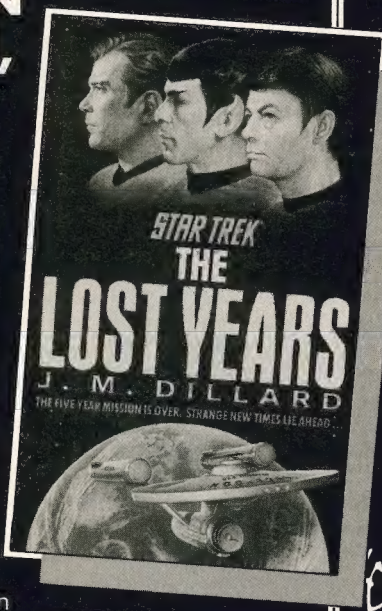
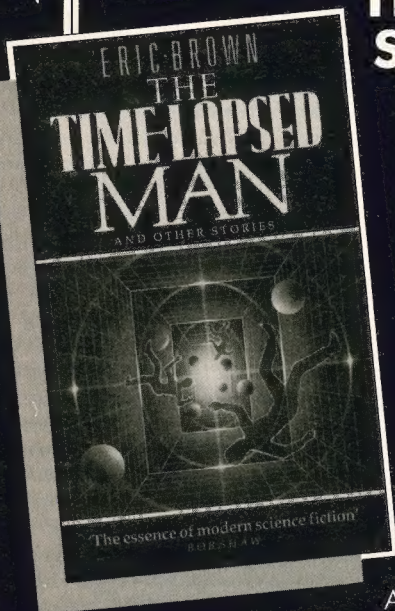
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Pan Books

Interface

Continued from page 4

SO MANY MAGAZINES

A couple of issues ago I mentioned two new British sf magazines, the paperback R.E.M. and the large-format *Psyko Candy*, both of which were due to appear on a quarterly schedule from June 1990. Well, they didn't. But R.E.M. should be out in August and I look forward to seeing a copy.

Yet another new magazine, in the horror/fantasy area and therefore more of a competitor for *Fear* than *IZ*, is the monthly **Skeleton Crew**. This is edited by Dave Hughes, who originally conceived it several years ago as a fanzine dedicated to the works of Stephen King (incidentally, this is not the same man as Dave W. Hughes, co-editor of the small-press magazine, *Works*). It has the backing of an established publishing company, Argus. A couple of issues will have appeared by the time you read this and the magazine should have enjoyed full newstrade distribution. I shall be very interested to see how well it does.

B.S.F.A. AWARDS

This year's British Science Fiction Association Awards were announced by **Nicholas Mahoney**, awards administrator, at the Easter SF Convention in Liverpool. The winners were as follows:

Best novel: *Pyramids* by **Terry Pratchett**

Best short fiction: "In Translation" by **Lisa Tuttle**

Best dramatic presentation: *Red Dwarf* by **Rob Grant & Doug Naylor**

Best artwork: cover by **Jim Burns** for *Other Edens III*

J.G. BALLARD EVENING

Nick Lowe reports: "The London Film-Makers' Co-op, whose inspired Friday evening programmes of experimental work are a long-established institution, ran a well-attended Ballard evening on 18th May 1990, as part of their 'Apocalypse Culture' season. Directly Ballardian material included Sam Scoggins' witty 1983 profile *The Unlimited Dream Company*; a rather poor music video *Crash: Give Your Body its Freedom*, claimed to be 'loosely based on Ballard's novel' (you could have fooled me); and an entirely dire commissioned video piece by Jeremy Welsh and Paul Green, *Terminal Zones*.

"Originally this last item was going to be *My Favourite Ballard*, in which 'different individuals read passages from Ballard novels combined with found footage and ambient landscape imagery' (uh-oh). In the event, as tends to happen, the concept shifted somewhat in the actual making, so that the Ballard texts were replaced by a pretty grim pastiche story of the makers' own. Shame: I'd been looking forward to 'Replies to a Questionnaire' read on camera and intercut with Heathrow tarmac puddles.

"There was some nice support programming, though: Bruce Connor's celebrated *Report*, a situationist collage of Kennedy assassination footage and ironic pop-culture juxtapositions; Ant Farm's *The Eternal Frame*, recording a performance event in Dealey Plaza reconstructing the assassination before the delighted Dallas public; Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, a Ballard and Ballardian favourite; and (best of all) two early-sixties crash research films from the Transport and Road Research Laboratory. In short, the usual Co-op mix of yawning tedium with unpredictable firecracker brilliance."

SCIENCE-FICTION CLASSES

A London University extra-mural course in "Reading Science Fiction" (taught in previous years by such luminaries as John Clute, Colin Greenland and Lisa Tuttle) is being taken over by **Brian Stableford**. It is to be held at the City Lit, Stukeley Street, London, on Friday nights beginning 28th September 1990 (7.30 pm). Details are available from the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, 26 Russell Square, London WC1B 5DQ. Brian will also be repeating his similar course at the University of Reading from January 1991 (last year's, advertised in *Interzone*, was judged a success by participants).

A CORRECTION

I intimated in the editorial of *IZ* 37 that **Robert Holdstock**, whose new horror novel, *The Fetch*, is to be published by Macdonald/Futura, was perhaps "another author to bolt the Gollancz stable." Not so, apparently. That sale is a one-off project, and he is currently under contract with Gollancz for a short-story collection as well as a third fantasy novel in the sequence which began with *Mythago Wood*. I've also heard it said that both the last-named novel and its sequel *Lavondyss* have sold very well – to a sufficient degree to boost Rob Holdstock nearly to the "Big Sellers" league. Good for him.

Geoff Ryman, recent winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award for his 1989 book *The Child Garden*, has just delivered his latest novel to Unwin Hyman. That will be another item to look out for next year, along with **Paul McAuley's** *Eternal Light* (Gollancz), new books by **Brian Aldiss** (Grafton) and **J. G. Ballard** (Collins), and several others. British sf, and imaginative writing in general, continues to flourish in the 1990s. (David Pringle)

COMING NEXT MONTH

Something big: a brand-new, original novella by William Gibson & Bruce Sterling. That's "The Angel of Goliad," a free-standing segment from their major new novel, *The Difference Engine* (set in an alternative 19th century in which Lord Byron lived to become Prime Minister, and his daughter Ada Lovelace encouraged inventor Charles Babbage to bring the steam-powered computer to fruition...). Plus another story by that amazing new writer Richard Calder; and more. There should be a Big Sellers piece, and additional non-fiction by David Langford and Charles Platt. So be sure to get the October 1990 *Interzone*, out in September.



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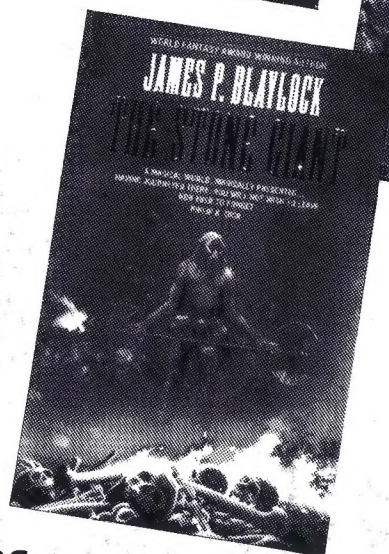
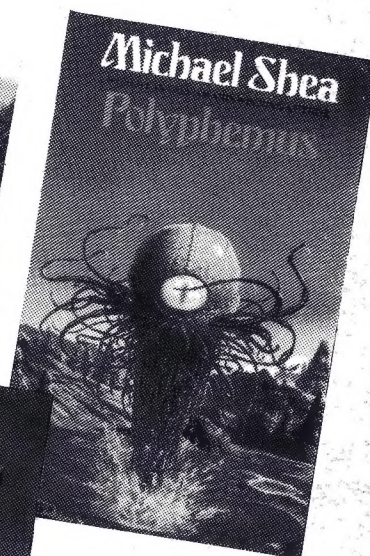
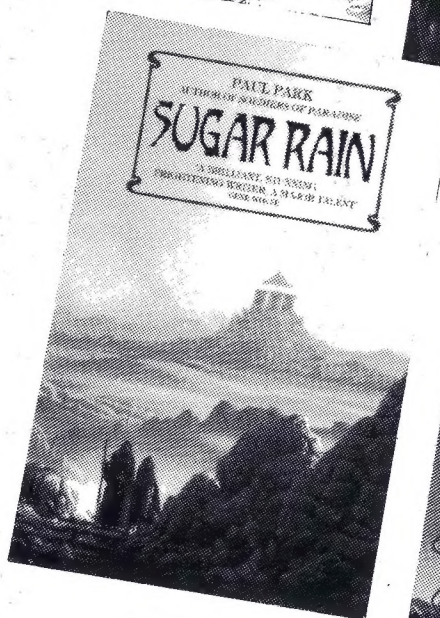
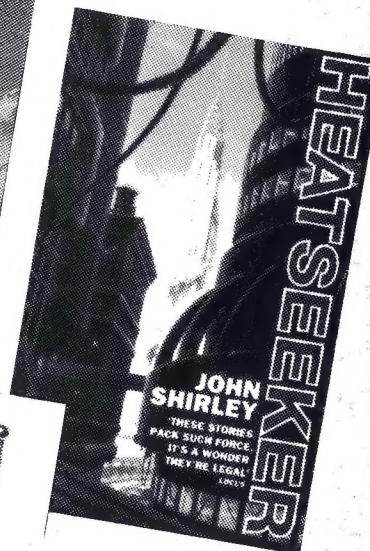
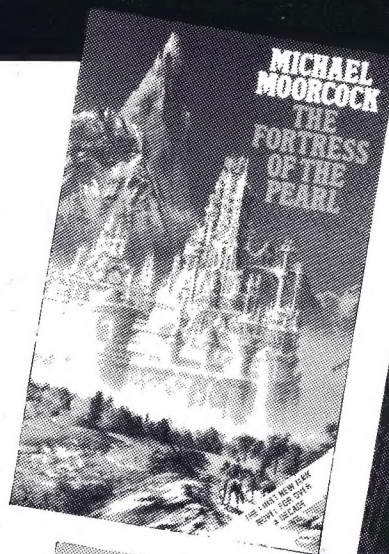
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